McFARLANE • CAPULLO

SPAWN®

COMPENDIUM

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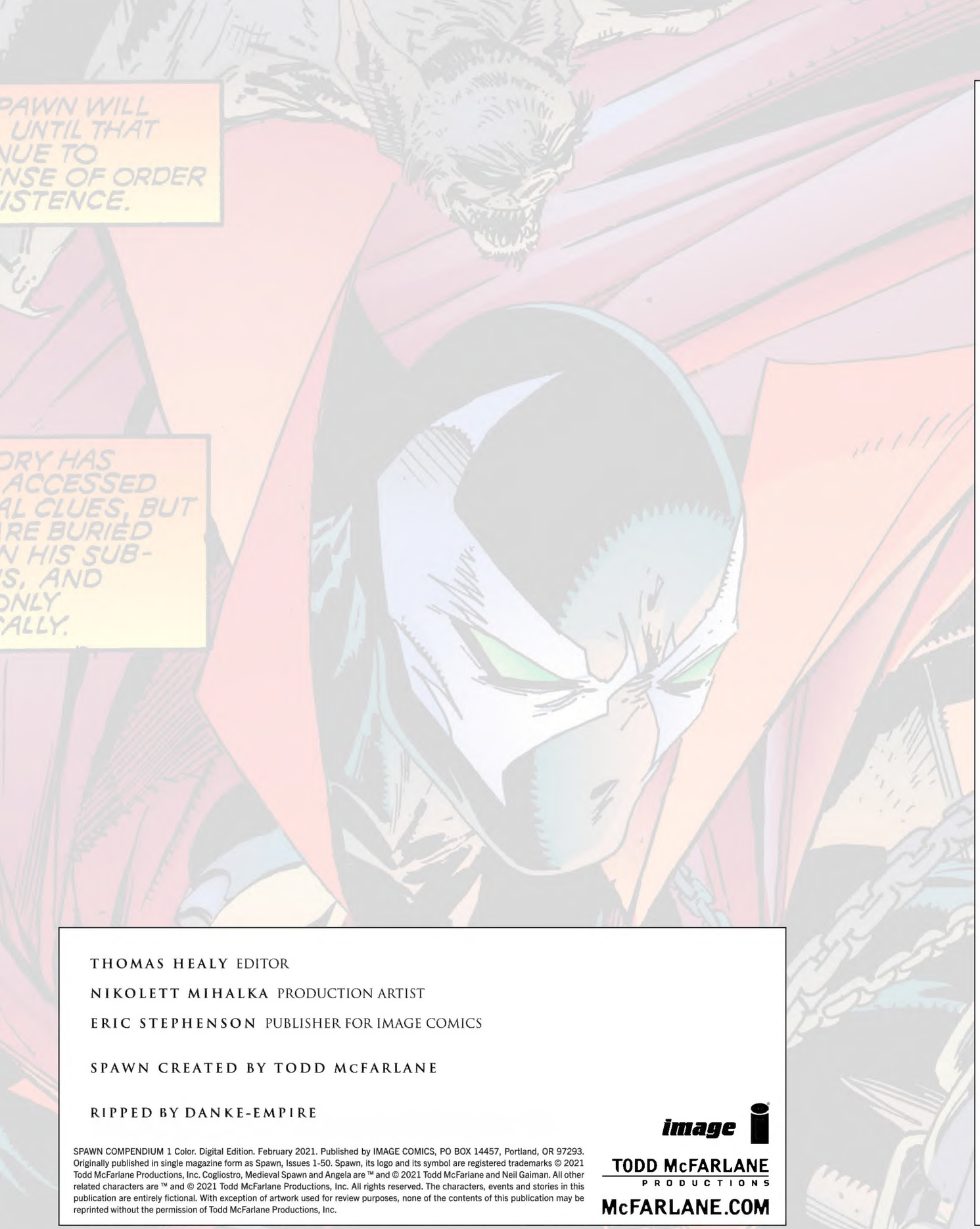

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SPAWN COMPENDIUM 1 Color. Digital Edition. February 2021. Published by IMAGE COMICS, PO BOX 14457, Portland, OR 97293. Originally published in single magazine form as Spawn, Issues 1-50. Spawn, its logo and its symbol are registered trademarks © 2021 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc. Cogliostro, Medieval Spawn and Angela are ™ and © 2021 Todd McFarlane and Neil Gaiman. All other related characters are ™ and © 2021 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc. All rights reserved. The characters, events and stories in this publication are entirely fictional. With exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this publication may be reprinted without the permission of Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.

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SPAWN

COMPENDIUM 1

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ISSUE 1

I DON'T BELONG.

NOT HERE. NOT NOW.

I HAVE TO GET BACK THERE.

THE BET WAS RIGGED, HE MADE ME BELIEVE.

NOW THERE'S DARKNESS IN MY SOUL.

...AGAIN.

I WANT TO DIE...

BUT I CHOSE TO COME BACK.

WHY?

SERVICES WERE HELD TODAY FOR LT. COLONEL ***AL SIMMONS*** AT ARLINGTON CEMETARY IN VIRGINIA. SIMMONS IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS COURAGEOUS INVOLVEMENT IN SAVING THE PRESIDENT FROM AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT.

SIMMONS ROSE THROUGH THE RANKS OF THE MARINE CORPS FOLLOWING HIS SERVICE OVERSEAS. HIS MEMORY WAS HONORED BY BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT, AS WELL AS HUNDREDS OF OFFICERS FROM ALL THE ARMED SERVICES.

HIS WIFE, ***WANDA BLAKE,*** REMAINED QUIET FOR THE DURATION OF THE FUNERAL, BUT SEEMED TO NEED HELP NEAR THE END OF THE PROCEEDINGS.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY HAVE ALL BEEN SUPPORTIVE, AND WILL START A NEW SCHOLARSHIP FUND IN HIS NAME THAT WILL BENEFIT THE UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND.

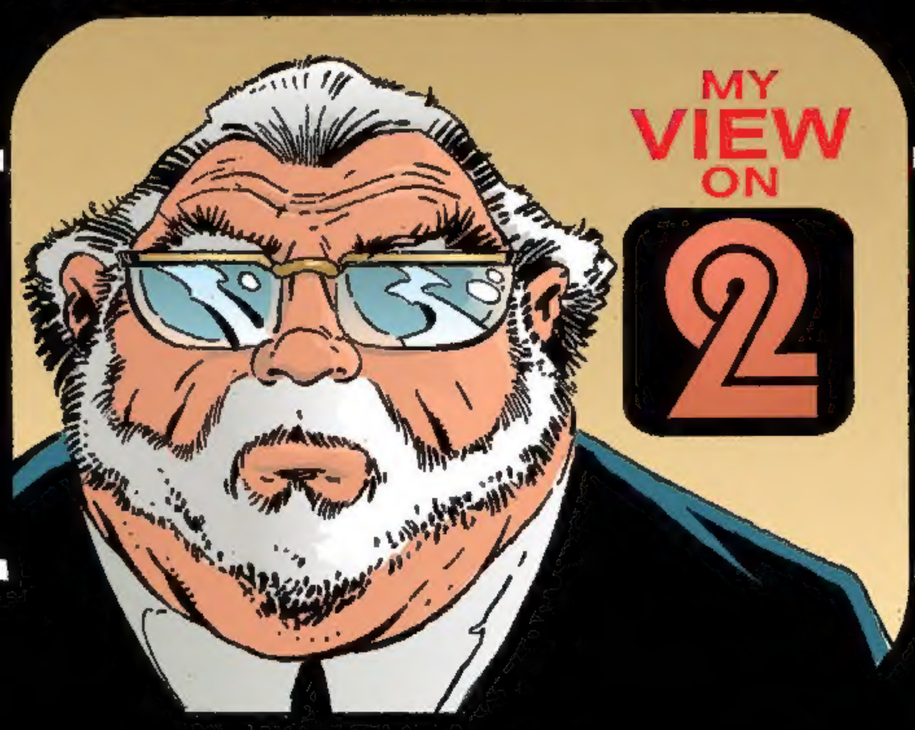
LT. COLONEL SIMMONS, WHO DISAPPEARED FROM PUBLIC VIEW SHORTLY AFTER THE HINCKLEY INCIDENT, WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH NUMEROUS COVERT GOVERNMENT TASK FORCES.

INFORMED SOURCES SAY THAT HIS PRESENCE IN BOTSWANA AT THE SAME TIME AS YOUNGBLOOD AGENTS WAS NO COINCIDENCE.

FRANKLY, THIS STINKS OF A GOVERNMENT ***COVER-UP.*** SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?

THOUGH I'M SURE LT. COL. SIMMONS WAS A MAN OF COURAGE AND INTEGRITY, IT'S THE GOVERNMENT'S ***BOYS' CLUB ATTITUDE*** THAT APPALLS ME.

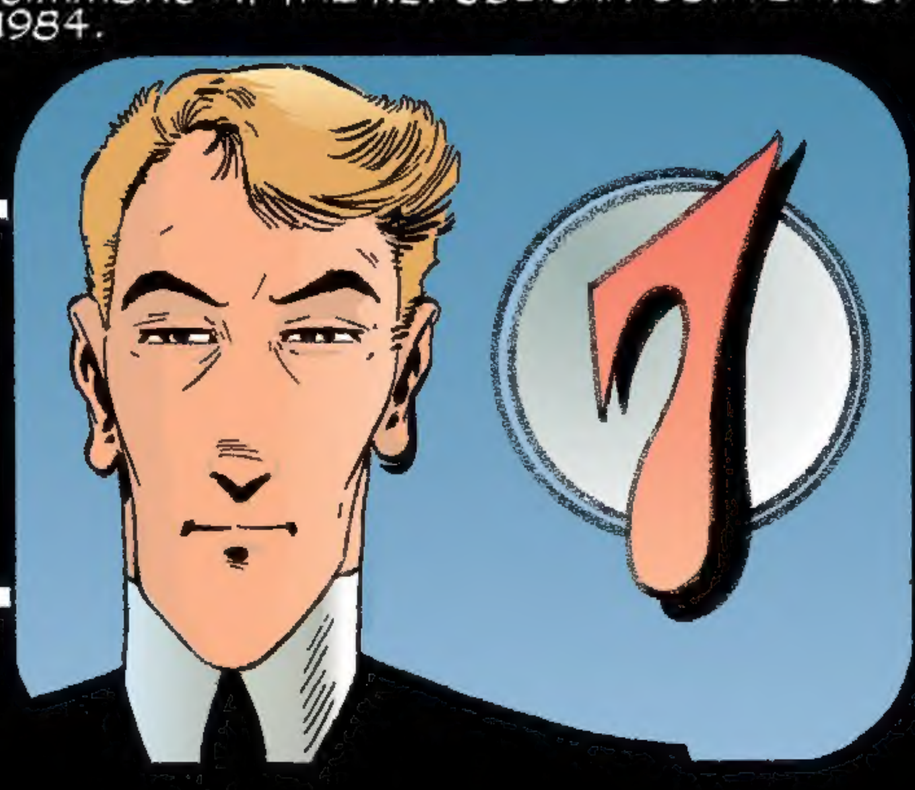
INFORMATION IS GIVEN OUT AT THEIR DISCRETION IN AN ALMOST HOLLYWOOD-TYPE FASHION, AND WE ALL KNOW HOW MOVIE MAKERS ***NEVER*** STRETCH THE TRUTH.

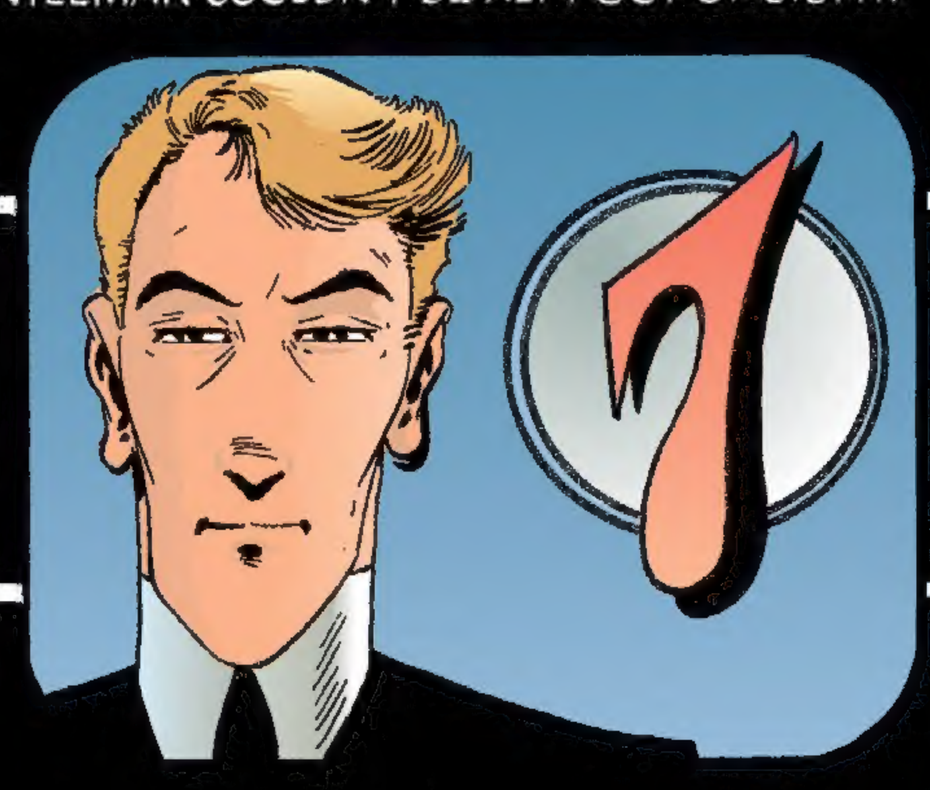


AND THE LOVELY WANDA BLAKE WAS ABSO***LUTE***LY ***DIVINE*** IN A DISARMINGLY SIMPLE JET BLACK GIOVANNI ORIGINAL. AND ***SAY,*** WHO WAS THAT TALL, DARK AND HANDSOME ***PRINCE*** ON HER ARM AT THE CEREMONY?

WELL, A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME THAT ***MARTIN ALEXANDER*** WAS WANDA'S CLOSEST FRIEND BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL. ***HE*** INTRODUCED HER TO AL SIMMONS AT THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION IN 1984.

WELL, WHERE THIS POTENTIAL AFFAIR IS LEADING REMAINS TO BE SEEN. ***WE'LL*** BE KEEPING AN EYE OUT. AS FOR ***YOU, MIS***TER MARTIN ALEXANDER, SHAME, ***SHAME*** ON YOU! LET THE POOR WOMAN ***GRIEVE.*** BESIDES, SHE'LL HAVE A TOUGH TIME FINDING A ***REPLACEMENT*** FOR A HUSBAND VOTED ONE OF *"THE TEN SEXIEST MEN"* TWO YEARS AGO. EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT TRIED TO ***HIDE*** THIS SWEET MORSEL FROM ALL OF US, ***THIS*** CHARISMATIC GENTLEMAN COULDN'T BE KEPT OUT OF SIGHT.





I REMEMBER THERE WAS SOMEONE.

SOMEONE TO LOVE.

SOMEONE TO HATE.

AND I WAS SOMETHING.

SOMETHING SPECIAL.

AND PROUD OF IT. FOR A TIME.

THEN THEY TURNED ON ME.

HE TURNED ON ME.

I REMEMBER...

...DYING.

AND HER. OH, GOD, SHE'S SO BEAUTIFUL.

I NEEDED.

HE GAVE.

I HAD TO.

ALL I COULD THINK OF

WAS HER.

SO I PROMISED,

AND HE ACCEPTED.

ALL BECAUSE OF HER.

DAMN HIS LIES.

HE ACCEPTED THE DEAL... ON **HIS** TERMS. HIS RULES. HIS WAY.

AND SOMEWHERE IN TIME HE BUST A GUT LAUGHING.

9·9·99

9:9:9:9

YEAH, HE GAVE ME POWER, BUT HE ROBBED ME OF MY MEMORIES.

IF I CAN JUST FIND HER, THEN I'LL KNOW WHAT THIS IS ABOUT. BUT... I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER WHO SHE IS.

NONE OF THIS MAKES ANY **SENSE**. A HANDFUL OF IMAGES DARTING IN MY MIND. **THAT'S IT?!** THAT'S ALL I HAVE OF MY LIFE?!

I FEEL I CAN DO ANYTHING... ANYTHING AT **ALL** WITH MY POWER. BUT WHY CAN'T I **REMEMBER**?

SHE'LL KNOW WHO I AM.

I'M GOING TO FIND HER, ALRIGHT.

AND WHEN I HAVE SOME ANSWERS...

...I'M GOING TO FIND HIM. THE ONE WHO FRAMED ME.

"OKAY, TWITCH. LET'S TRY THIS *ONE* MORE TIME."

YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT SOMEBODY THREW CARLO GIAMOTTI FROM A *WINDOW*--

THROUGH A WINDOW, SIR.

--THROUGH A WINDOW, ON THE THIRTY-FOURTH FLOOR--

FORTY-FOURTH, SIR.

AND HE *WASN'T* KILLED BY THE FALL?

NO, SIR. IT WAS HIS HEART.

HEART FAILURE?

Umm-- YOU MIGHT SAY THAT, SIR. IT WAS REMOVED.

REMOVED?

YES, SIR. IT WAS STUFFED IN HIS MOUTH.

TWITCH.

YES, SIR?

WE GOT THREE DEAD HIT MEN IN THE LAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS AND *YOU'RE* TRYIN' TO BE A *COMEDIAN.* I DON'T NEED THAT.

NO, SIR.

I AIN'T *COMPLAININ'*, MIND YOU. SOMEBODY'S SAVIN' ME A LOT OF WORK. I FIGURE WE GOT OURSELVES EITHER A GRADE-A *WACKO* OR THE BEST DAMN VOLUNTEER *COP* IN NEW YORK CITY.

NO, SIR.

YES, SIR.

PROBABLY BOTH.

IT'S A HELLUVA TOWN, TWITCH.

YES, SIR.

BOYS, LOOKS LIKE SHE'S GOT ENOUGH FOR *ALL* OF US.

FORTUNATELY, *I* GET FIRST DIBS.

NO! NO! PLEASE DON'T!

SHADDUP, BITCH.

BACK OFF, GUYS.

I GOT ME AN IDEA.

WAIT A SEC...

LET'S SEE HOW LOUD THE TRAMP CAN SCREAM AFTER I CUT OUT HER TONGUE.

...I WANT A *CLOSER* LOOK WHILE THE BODY'S STILL WARM.

GET OUT. NOW!

OR YOU'RE ALL DEAD.

WHAT THE HELL?

HEY SHANK, LOOKS LIKE ONE O' THEM YOUNG-BLOODS!

WHO CARES? CHECK THIS OUT, GUYS--

I'M GONNA CARVE ME A SUPER--

--HKKKHH!

BAD IDEA.

NOW, WHO'S NEXT?

YOU CRAZY M.F., NOBODY JERKS WITH *ME*.

FAT BOY. YOU'RE **WAY** OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE.

BOOM

THEY'RE GONE. YOU NEEDN'T BE AFRAID.

PLEASE.. DON'T-- I'LL... I'LL DO WHAT YOU WANT

"UH!!"

NO.

NOT AGAIN.

NO

ONCE AGAIN YOUR MIND EXPLODES WITH A SEARING PAIN. A FLOODGATE OF MEMORIES BURSTS WIDE.

YET IT IS **HER** FACE THAT KEEPS HAUNTING YOU.

ALWAYS HER FACE.

WHO IS SHE?

THEN THINGS BEGIN TO CRYSTALIZE.

YOU REMEMBER YOUR **FUNERAL.** BEGGING AND PLEADING FOR SOMEONE TO RELEASE YOU FROM THE DARK-NESS. YOU'RE NOT DEAD. YOU **CAN'T** BE.

THEN YOU FEEL HER PRESENCE. WARM. CARING. SOOTHING. BUT SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE SHE FEELS EMPTY NOW.

SHE HAS NO REASON. NO MEANING. **NO SOUL.**

BUT YOUR SOUL LIVES.

WHILE HERS IS DYING.

Hh- huhhh hhuhhhh ...

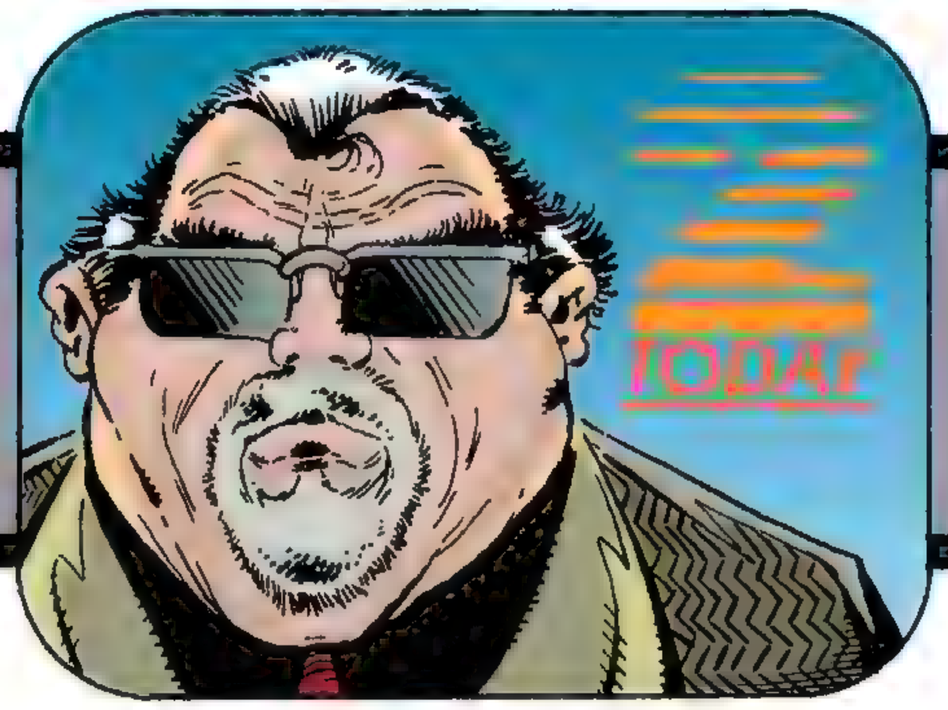
HEY-- COME ON. IT'S OKAY. YOU'RE ALRIGHT. IT'S ALL OVER NOW.

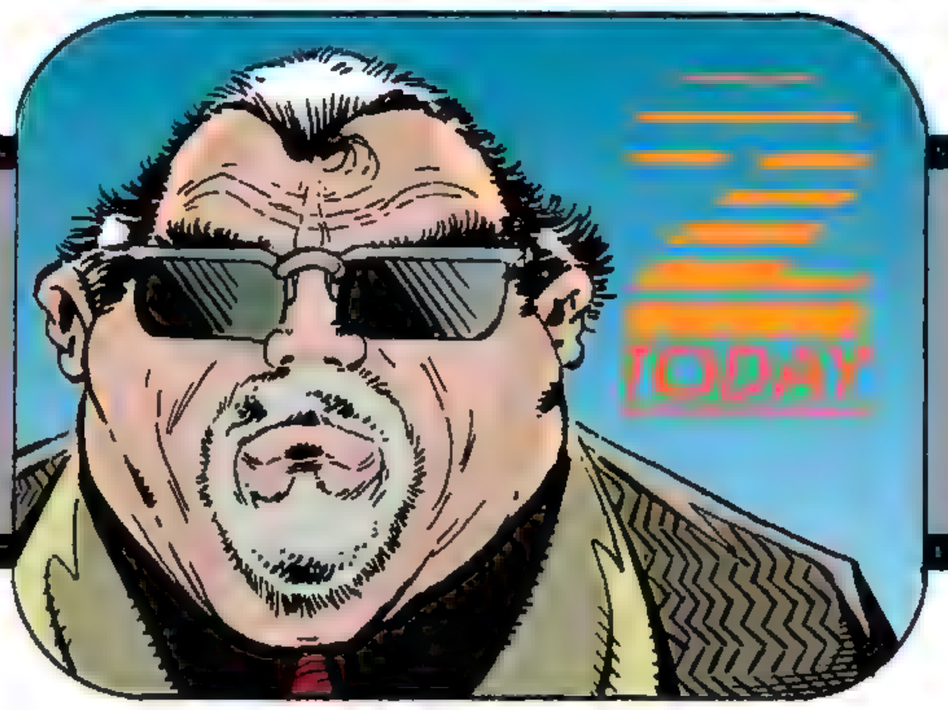
POLICE ARE INVESTIGATING THE FOURTH GANGLAND HOMICIDE IN TWO DAYS. THE MURDER OF ***CARLO GIAMOTTI*** MAKES THE SEVENTH GANGLAND MURDER THIS YEAR, BUT CHIEF OF POLICE TIM BANKS DENIES ANY TRUTH TO THE RUMOR OF A POSSIBLE "MOB WAR."

INSIDE SOURCES HAVE ALSO REPORTED THAT THE THREE MOST RECENT DEATHS WERE UNLIKE ANY THEY HAD SEEN BEFORE. IT WAS QUOTED, *"EVEN THE BAD GUYS DON'T SINK THIS LOW."* THE MYSTERY OF THESE DEATHS SEEMS TO HAVE...

THIS MIGHT BE JUST WHAT THIS CITY NEEDS. WITH PEOPLE LIKE ***JAKE MORELLI,*** DISGUISED AS A WELL-DRESSED BUSINESSMAN, IT'S NO WONDER THE POLICE WON'T MAKE ANY ARRESTS. POLICE CHIEF BANKS SAYS HE'LL SEND OUT AN INVESTIGATIVE UNIT TO FLUSH OUT SOME ANSWERS. ***WHAT'S TO INVESTIGATE?*** JUST BECAUSE SOMETHING SMELLS ***NOW*** DOESN'T MEAN IT WASN'T GARBAGE ***BEFORE.***

I FOR ONE HOPE THE POLICE DON'T ***FIND*** ANY ANSWERS. OR WORSE YET, TRY AND ***STOP*** THIS LATEST RASH OF PUBLIC EXECUTIONS. IF IT'S GOOD GUYS KILLING BAD OR ***BAD*** GUYS KILLING BAD-- ***WHO CARES?*** GIVE ME A CALL IF YOU CITIZENS NEED ANY HELP.



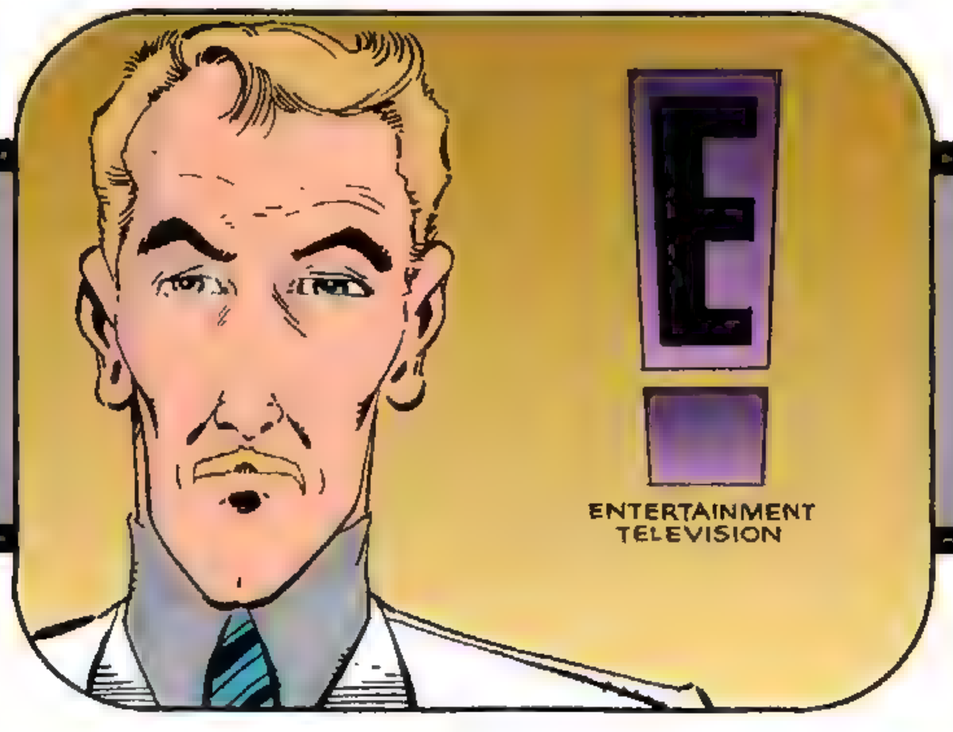


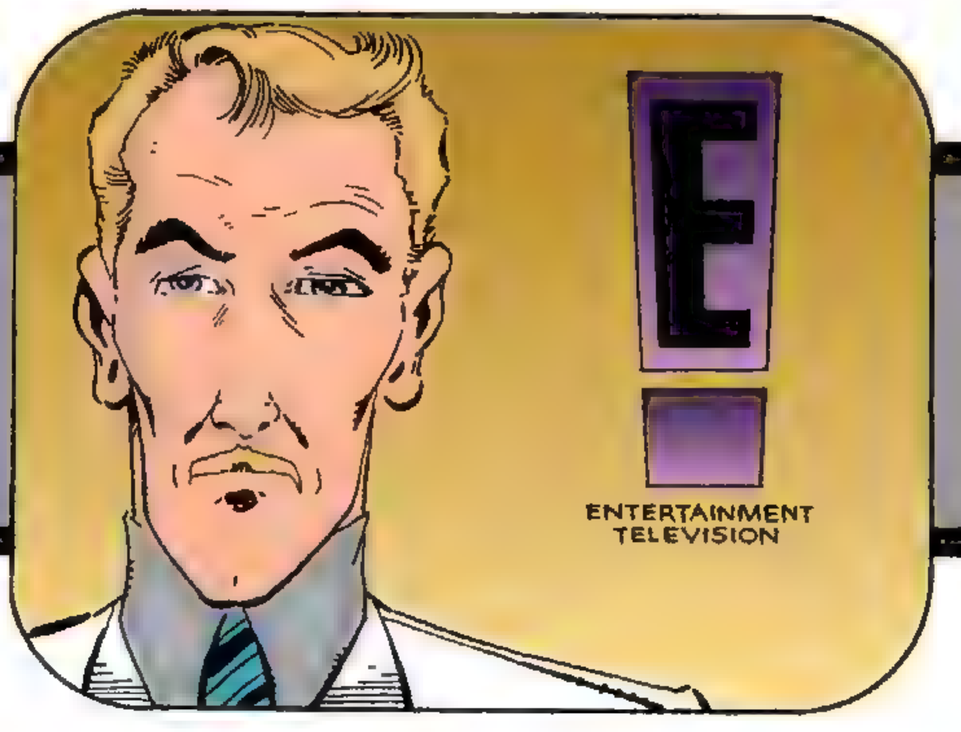
... I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND ***HOW*** THOSE TWO HAVE MANAGED TO STAY TOGETHER ALL THESE YEARS. ***SOME***ONE MUST BE ***TOR***TURING ME.

AND ***FINALLY,*** WORD OUT OF NEW YORK IS THAT THERE'S A NEW ***MYSTERY MAN*** IN THE BIG APPLE. ONLY A HANDFUL OF REPORTS SO FAR, BUT FROM WHAT I CAN ***TELL,*** OUR BIG BRUISER HAS A FETISH FOR ***ZORRO.***

I MEAN, LET'S GET ***SERIOUS.*** A ***CAPE!*** WITH THE ***YOUNGBLOOD*** FASHIONS BEING ALL THE RAGE, ***WHY*** ON ***EARTH*** WOULD ***ANY***ONE TRY TO BRING BACK SUCH A ***GAUCHE*** AND TOTALLY ***USE***LESS ***ACCES***SORY?

NOW THOSE ***SPIKES*** AND ***CHAINS*** HE HAS, ***THOSE*** ARE SIMPLY ***DAR***LING. A PERFECTLY ***RIVETING*** STATEMENT.





SO BEAUTIFUL. BUT WHO IS SHE? WHY DO I KEEP--

GOD. NO.

SHE'S MY WIFE.

I HAVE A WIFE.

BUT I CAN'T REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT HER NAME IS OR THE COLOR OF HER EYES, BUT WE WERE HUSBAND AND WIFE. THAT'S WHY SHE WAS GRIEVING AT THE FUNERAL. IT WAS **HER** THAT MADE ME WANT TO COME **BACK**.

I LET MY MERCENARY INSTINCTS TAKE OVER TOO **QUICKLY**. GOT TOO CAUGHT UP IN THIS DAMN COSTUME. I'M NO HERO.

IT'S JUST THAT EVERYTHING IS SO **DIFFERENT**. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE LAST FIVE YEARS? I'M STRANDED HERE NOT KNOWING **WHAT'S** GOING ON.

I **KNOW** I'M ALIVE BUT I CAN'T **FEEL** IT.

ONLY THING I FEEL IS THIS DAMN **COSTUME**. GOT TO GET IT **OFF**-- GET **AWAY** FROM IT.

MY FACE-- FELT LIKE--

JESUS!! WHAT AM I?

WHAT AM I?

I DUNNO, TWITCH...

IF IT REALLY *IS* SOME GOVERNMENT HERO GONE WACKO, THEM WASHINGTON STIFFS AIN'T GONNA LET US GET CLOSE. THEM TIGHT ASSES. BUT IF THIS GUY DECIDES HE WANTS TO START SNUFFING OUT "JOE AVERAGE," THEN WE GOT OURSELVES A ***SERIOUS*** PROBLEM.

AND THE DAMAGE THIS GUY HAS DONE TO THOSE THREE BODIES IS FRIGGIN' ***UNREAL***. WONDER HOW MUCH ***POWER*** THIS GUY HAS IN HIM?

"LIKE I SAID, IT'S A HELLUVA TOWN."

"YES SIR. BY THE WAY, I HEAR YOU HAD ONLY THIRTEEN DOUGHNUTS TODAY. DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE DIETING."

"SHUDDUP, TWITCH. I'M NOT IN A MOOD FOR YOUR JOKES."

"YES SIR."

HAHAHAH

ISSUE 2

-- AND THEN I'LL TELL HIM-- IF HE BEGS ME REALLY, **REALLY,** NICE LIKE, I MIGHT ONLY AMPUTATE *ONE* LEG.

BUT!

IF HE PUTS UP A *FIGHT...*

... I'M GONNA HAFTA RIP HIS *INNARDS* OUT, MAKE FILLETS OUTTA HIS *LUNGS,* MAKE A *MILK SHAKE* OUTTA HIS **HEART,** **AND** SOFT-BOIL HIS *EYEBALLS,* 'CAUSE...

...I'M THE VOLTAR!

meow.

IMPRESSIVE. I KNOW.

BUT, WHEN YOU'RE STRIKING FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF OTHERS, A LITTLE *BRAVADO* GOES A LONG WAY.

BESIDES, IT SEEMS TO *WORK* IN COMICS.

*ANY*WAYS, IT'LL FINALLY COME DOWN TO THAT BIG, LONG, DRAWN-OUT *BATTLE*.

BUT!

JUST WHEN I'M ABOUT TO PULL HIS SPINE THROUGH HIS NOSE--

--I'LL STOP!

--TELL 'IM I COULD KILL 'IM SIXTY-FIVE DIFFERENT WAYS... BUT I'M NOT *ALLOWED* TO... !

HE'LL START TO *BEG* ME. AND I'LL SPIT IN HIS *FACE*. THEN HE'LL *CRY*. AT WHICH TIME I'LL KICK HIS TEETH IN!

AND WHEN HE THINKS IT CAN'T GET ANY WORSE... I'LL *PULVERIZE* IM' INTO A LITTLE ITTY BITTY CUBE AND *SUCK* 'IM LIKE A LIFESAVER!

HAHAHAHAHAHAA

I GOTTA *TELL* YA, Mr. PUSSY, I'M HAVING *FAR* TOO MUCH FUN.

THE *BOSS* WILL BE TOTALLY IMPRESSED.

HELL! *I'M* TOTALLY IMPRESSED!

OH, *I LOVE BEING ME!!*

AND I'D HATE TO BE *HIM* TONIGHT!

"I'D HATE TO BE SPAWN!"

MY WIFE.

I'VE GOT TO FIND HER... LET HER KNOW I'M BACK, I'M ALIVE. PEOPLE THINK I DIED FIVE YEARS AGO. WHAT'S SHE GOING TO THINK?

NOT GOING TO MATTER MUCH IF I CAN'T FIND HER.

DON'T KNOW WHERE WE LIVED. OR WHERE WE WORKED.

THIS WHOLE THING IS COMPLETELY NUTS. I'M FLOATING IN LIMBO ONE SECOND, THEN, **BANG!**-- HERE I AM. **ALIVE!** OR SO IT SEEMS. BUT OTHER THAN HER, ALL I REMEMBER IS MAKING A **DEAL**...

...ONE THAT INCLUDED MY **SOUL**.

DON'T KNOW HOW IT WAS DONE. AT LEAST I KNOW **WHY.** IT WAS FOR **HER.**

GOD, I WISH I COULD REMEMBER HER NAME.

FOR TWO DAYS I'VE BEEN TRYING TO MAKE SOME SENSE OF THIS. NO NAME. NO MONEY. NO HOME.

SO I **HID...**

...HOPING THIS WAS ALL JUST A DREAM. IT'S **NOT.**

WHATEVER DEAL WAS MADE, I GOT **SCREWED!**

HE'S PLAYING WITH MY MEMORIES, GIVING ME BITS AND PIECES AT HIS LEISURE. IT'S ALL SOME SICK **GAME** TO HIM. AND I FELL RIGHT INTO HIS **TRAP.**

HE GAVE ME POWER. **LIFE.** BUT IT COST ME MY SOUL, MY **IDENTITY.** THE SCUM EVEN STOLE MY FACE.

I DON'T EVEN THINK I'M **HUMAN** ANYMORE.

SO WHY WOULD MY WIFE **WANT** ME AGAIN?

CAN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT NOW. I NEED HER! THAT'S WHAT MATTERS.

IT'S ALL I HAVE.

THIS COSTUME FEELS MORE COMFORTABLE THAN MY **REAL** SKIN. WHAT'S **LEFT** OF IT.

THIS NEW LOOK SEEMED TO WORK AGAINST THOSE **RAPISTS** THE OTHER NIGHT, THOUGH.

I LET MY INSTINCTS CARRY ME THROUGH THAT. WONDER IF THAT LADY'S ALRIGHT? I JUST ABOUT SCARED HER TO **DEATH**, 'TIL I FREAKED!

THE MEMORIES KEEP HITTING ME LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN. **THAT** COULD BE TROUBLE.

IF THAT HAPPENS WHEN I'M...

uh?

MAYBE THIS CHURCH IS A CLUE. IT'S THE **SECOND** TIME I'VE BEEN DRAWN TO THIS PLACE.

WHAT'S THAT GUY DOING, WAVING? RATHER ODD LITTLE MAN. NOW WHAT?

HE'S DISAPPEARED INTO THE SHADOWS. STRANGE.

LATER, AT THE DAWNCORP BUILDING...

IT WAS BUILT IN RECORD TIME, AND EVEN CAME IN UNDER BUDGET, WHILE BEING FITTED WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY... ESPECIALLY ITS SECURITY SYSTEM. "UNBEATABLE," THEY SAID. "IMPENETRABLE."

NOW, NEW YORK CITY'S ORGANIZED CRIME COULD BE SAFE.

OR SO THEY THINK.

GOD ALMIGHTY! WHAT ARE YOU?!!

NO! NO! STAY BACK ! I'LL KILL YOU!

BLAM BLAM BLAM

SWEET MOTHER OF MERCY.

GNNAAAAAAAAA

HOLD ON, BOSS! I'M COMING!

WAM WAM

OPEN UP! BOSS, OPEN THE DOOR!

YOUR BOSS IS *UNAVAILABLE.*

BUT HE *DID* SAY HE WANTED YOU...

UMMPH!

...TO *JOIN* HIM TONIGHT.

NITE-
NITE,
BOYS.

WELL, WELL, WELL. IT BREAKS MY HEART TO REPORT ANOTHER COUPLE OF MAFIA KILLINGS. IT LOOKS LIKE OUR BOY THE "HEART SURGEON" IS AT IT AGAIN. THOUGH THE POLICE HAVEN'T CONFIRMED ANY CONNECTION TO THE ***OTHER*** DEATHS, ONLY THOSE OF US WHO ARE BRAIN-DEAD CAN'T FIGURE ***THIS*** ONE OUT.

THE POLICE ALSO REPORT THAT THEY'VE DOUBLED THE TASK FORCE INVESTIGATING THESE VEG-O-MATIC KILLINGS. MY ONLY QUESTION:

WHY?!! LAST TIME I CHECKED, ***ALL*** SIX OF THEM WERE 'LEG-BREAKERS.

WHAT'S TO INVESTIGATE? AM I THE ONLY ONE ASKING THIS QUESTION?

I'VE GOT A BETTER IDEA-- LET ME HELP DIG THE GRAVES.

AS I'VE STATED BEFORE, RUMORS ARE THE UGLY SIDE OF SHOW BIZ.

THE YOUNGBLOODS, CHANGING THEIR COSTUMES FOR ONE UNIFIED LOOK? ***C'MON,*** IT'S THE MYRIAD COLORS AND ENSEMBLES THAT ***TOOK*** THEM TO THE TOP, ***WHY*** IN HEAVEN'S NAME WOULD THEY WANT TO ALIENATE THEIR FANS ***NOW?***

SEX APPEAL HAS ***ALWAYS*** BEEN A BIG PRIORITY TO THE MARKETING GENIUSES BEHIND OUR HEROES IN TIGHTS. 'BLOOD MERCHANDISE IS OVER THE $2.2 ***BIL***LION MARK AL***READY.*** I JUST ***KNEW*** THERE'D BE A DAY THEY'D TOPPLE THOSE PIZZA-EATING TURTLES.

AND ***SPEAKING*** OF GREEN GUYS, CHICAGO IS REPORTING THE APPEARANCE OF A ***DRAGON,*** FIN AND ***ALL.*** NOW WOULDN'T ***THAT*** MAKE A GREAT TICKLER.

,,, SOURCES ALSO INDICATE THAT SINCE TONIGHT'S MURDERS, OVER A DOZEN OF NEW YORK'S MOST POWERFUL MEN HAVE ASKED FOR POLICE PROTECTION. ALL OF THESE MEN HAVE 'ALLEGED' CONNECTIONS TO CRIMINAL AFFAIRS.

ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, ***WANDA BLAKE,*** WIDOW OF ***LT. COL. AL SIMMONS,*** HELPED OPEN ANOTHER CARE CLINIC FOR DISABLED CHILDREN.

MONEY GENERATED BY HER LATE HUSBAND'S MEMORIAL FUND HELPED FINISH THE CENTER, WHICH HAD BEEN ON HOLD. THE CURRENT RECESSION IS BLAMED.

THIS IS THE THIRD SUCH PROJECT THAT Ms. BLAKE HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH.

I'M HOPING THESE NEW POWERS CAN HELP ME FIND MY WIFE.

WHY'D I EVEN **GET** THESE POWERS? ALL I WANTED WAS TO **SEE** HER.

TO **HOLD** MY WIFE.

HA! JOKE'S ON ME. WHY WOULD **SHE** WANT TO HOLD **ME** WHEN I LOOK LIKE A ROTTING **CORPSE?**

DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I'M **ALIVE**, MUCH LESS A **MAN.**

THINGS MADE MORE SENSE WHEN I WAS **DEAD.**

DAMN HIM.

FUNNY--

--GUESS I BEAT HIM TO IT.

WELL, LET'S SEE EXACTLY WHAT THESE FRIGGIN' POWERS CAN **DO.** SEE IF THEY CAN MAKE ME **WHOLE** AGAIN.

9:9:9:5

MAN! WHAT A JOLT!

FEEL GOOD THOUGH. STRONG. ALMOST AFRAID TO **LOOK.** BUT...

OH MY GOD.

NO!!

JEEZ, NO.

COME ON!!

WORK!!

NOT AGAIN.

THIS CAN'T BE.

I'M A BLACK MAN!

WORLD'S GONE CRAZY, TWITCH.

CHIEF'S BEEN ON MY BUTT ALL NIGHT. FIGURES WE AIN'T MOVING FAST ENOUGH.

HOW'S HE EXPECT US TO DO FIVE REPORTS TONIGHT.

SIX, SIR.

STUPID REPORTERS GOT EVERYONE IN A PANIC. SURE AIN'T MAKIN' MY JOB EASIER.

NO ONE SAID THEY WOULD, SIR.

JUST ONCE I'D LIKE TO SPEND A QUIET NIGHT AT THE OFFICE. NO REPORTS. NO PHONES RINGING. NO WORRIES. NO NOTHIN'.

THEN YOU'D BE DEAD.

DON'T I WISH.

Los Angeles Times

HEART ATTACKS

WHAT KIND OF JOLLIES DO THEY GET OUTTA DESCRIBING HOW DEEP THE HEART HAS BEEN SHOVED DOWN A GUY'S THROAT.

DON'T NOBODY WANNA HEAR ABOUT DOC GOODEN'S SHOULDER ANY-MORE.

PLUS, WE STILL GOT THAT PROBLEM OF SOME COSTUME FREAK HIDING IN ALLEYWAYS.

CAN YOU IMAGINE. A HERO THAT AIN'T RICH. WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO.

DUNNO, SIR.

WELL, ME NEITHER. EXCEPT WE GET PAID TO FIND ANSWERS...THAT MEANS NOT SLEEPING OR EATING FOR THREE OR FOUR DAYS. WHO ARE WE TO QUESTION, RIGHT?

BY THE WAY, SIR.

YEAH?

HOW IS GOODEN'S SHOULDER THESE DAYS?

TWITCH.

YES, SIR.

SHUDDUP!

RELAX, GINO.

YOU'RE BAD, AND I *ADMIRE* THAT.

UNFORTUNATELY, I NEED YOU TO HELP ME.

HERE'S THE *DEAL*. YOU LEND ME A SMALL PIECE OF YOUR ANATOMY, AND *I* LET YOUR SOUL GET TORTURED FOREVER.

SO... GUESS WHAT'S *NEXT?*

JESUS!

JESUS!

JESUS!

JESUS!

JESUS!

BAD GUESS!

I WON'T STAY LIKE THIS. NOT WHITE.

SOMEONE'S PLAYING A BAD JOKE. SCREWING WITH MY MIND.

WHY?! DAMN YOU!

WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?! I JUST WANTED TO SEE MY WIFE! NOW SHE WON'T EVEN KNOW WHO I AM! IF THIS IS SOME KIND OF WAR...

...THEN COME GET ME!

GOD.

AM I GOING CRAZY?!

I JUST WANT TO BE ME. BUT THESE FRIGGIN' POWERS WON'T WORK.

CAN'T MAKE ME WHOLE.

SUDDENLY, YOUR MIND EXPLODES. THEN, AS IF ON CUE...

WHY?

SEE IF YOU CAN KILL ME AGAIN!

ANOTHER FLASHBACK. ANOTHER CLUE.

JASON WYNN. HE WAS YOUR BOSS... THE ONE THE PRESIDENT SAID WOULD TAKE CARE OF YOU. BE YOUR MENTOR.

HE **TAUGHT** YOU, ALRIGHT. TAUGHT YOU HOW TO **FIGHT.** HOW TO **KILL.** HOW TO **OBEY.**

FOR A TIME YOU WERE LIKE BROTHERS. BUT ALL SIBLINGS EVEN-TUALLY LOCK HORNS.

THE FIGHTS BECAME MORE FREQUENT--THE INTENSITY MUCH HIGHER. YOU SMELLED COVER-UP TOO MANY TIMES.

LIBERTIES WERE BEING TAKEN, RULES BROKEN, ALL IN THE NAME OF DEMOCRACY. FREEDOM. BUT THE PRICE PAID WAS OBSCENE: INNOCENT PEOPLE WHOSE CHOICES WERE TAKEN AWAY...

...WHOSE OPTIONS HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM THEM.

AMERICA HAD BECOME A BULLY, OR SO YOUR CLOUDED MIND WAS CONVINCED. ONLY ONE THOUGHT MADE YOU ANGRIER:

...THAT HE DIDN'T CARE.

EVEN WORSE, HE SEEMED TO REVEL IN THE PAIN HE CAUSED OTHERS. AS THE DAYS WENT BY, YOU COULD SEE IT IN HIS EYES.

JASON HAD BECOME TRULY EVIL.

CAIN AND ABEL HAD NOTHING ON YOU TWO.

9:4:3:2

No! No! AAAAAAA

WHAT'D'YA DO TO HIM?! STAY AWAY FROM ME-- I SAID-- NOOOOO!

AAAAAA!

YES.

GLOP

GLOP

THIS IS GETTING BORING.

help.

HEY! MISTER! YOU NEED HELP?

UH?!

C'MON, BUD. SHAKE IT *OFF!*

YA KNOW, I COULDN'T TELL IF YOU WERE JUST TANKED OR *WHAT*... NOT THAT IT MATTERS, *I* ENJOY A NIP EVERY NOW AN' THEN, *TOO*. BUT THAT *MOANING* OF YOURS DIDN'T SOUND LIKE THE *ENJOYABLE* KIND.

WHO... WHO ARE YOU?!

NOT THAT I'M *COMPLAINING*, MIND YOU. WHO'S THINKING OF SLEEP AT TWO IN THE MORNING *ANY*WAYS?

NOT ME. I'M *WIRED!!*

I'M OKAY NOW. JUST A BIT DIZZY.

HOW'D MY MASK GET BACK ON?

DON'T *WORRY*. I PUT IT BACK ON WHILE YOU WERE IN *LA-LA* LAND. HECK OF AN *ACNE* PROBLEM YOU GOT THERE.

YOU MUST HAVE TO **SCRAPE** THE PUSS OFF THE MIRROR WHEN YOU'RE DONE.

I KNOW YOU.

Oh-oh.

I SAW YOU FROM THE TOP OF THE CHURCH... YOU WAVED AT ME! DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

THE SPAWN?

YEAH. YEAH. YEAH. YOU'RE THE *SPAWN*. SO WHAT'S THE BIG *DEAL*?

YEAH. *YOU* KNOW. NOT LIKE *SALMON* OR NOTHIN', BUT LIKE A *HELL*SPAWN *GET* IT?

I DO GET IT. SO HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME?

GOD...

DO YOU KNOW WHERE MY WIFE IS?!

NEVER *SEEN* THE CHICK!

AND STOP USING THAT G-WORD. HURTS MY EARS.

SINCE MY COVER'S BEEN BLOWN, LET ME TELL YOU WHY I'M *HERE*.

WHETHER YOU BELIEVE IT OR *NOT*, I COULD BEAT YOU SILLY WITH ONE *HAND* BEHIND MY BACK. OR I COULD RIP THE *TOENAILS* FROM YOUR FEET AND SEVER THE TENDONS IN YOUR *CALVES*.

AND *ANOTHER* THING, *MR. BIG SHOT*, I COULD RIP YOUR SPINE OUT AND USE IT LIKE A *WHIP!* -AND I COULD *SNAP* YOUR BONES LIKE THE BRITTLE CHUNKS THAT THEY ARE! -*AND* I COULD *TEAR YOUR HEAD* OFF AND USE IT FOR A *BASKETBALL!* -*AND* I COULD CUT YOU *UP* INTO BITE-SIZE *PIECES* AND *MAIL* YOU ACROSS FIFTY *ZIP CODES!*

ARE YA SCARED YET?

-AND ANOTHER THING! IF I'M IN A REALLY PISSY MOOD I MIGHT JUST... JUST...

OH. OH.

Um. COULD YOU EXCUSE ME A MOMENT?

HEE HEE

NOW WHERE WAS I...

OH YEAH!

...AND I COULD MAKE JELLY MOLDS OUTTA YOUR INTESTINES, SMEAR COOL WHIP ON TOP AND EAT THE WHOLE THING WITHOUT PUKING!!

-AND I COULD...

LISTEN, BUDDY, I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS.

OR YOU.

AWWW! C'MON, MISTER...

...HAVE A HEART!

NEXT ISSUE:
SPAWN vs. the TRUE VIOLATOR!

ISSUE 3

WANDA!

THAT'S IT!

FINALLY, I REMEMBER HER NAME. **WANDA BLAKE.** I REMEMBER HOW HER GRANDMA HAD A FIT AT THE WEDDING, WHEN SHE FOUND OUT WANDA WASN'T GOING TO TAKE MY LAST NAME.

WONDER HOW GRANDMA BLAKE **IS** THESE DAYS. SHE COULD BE DEAD FOR ALL I KNOW. HELL, **EVERYONE** I KNEW COULD BE DEAD. **STILL** CAN'T RECALL ALL MY LIFE, BUT THE PIECES ARE COMING TOGETHER FASTER NOW.

EVERY FLASH OF MEMORY ADDS ANOTHER STRING OF INFO. FUNNY HOW BEING A WALKING DEAD MAN CAN SCREW UP YOUR LIFE.

AT LEAST I REMEMBERED WANDA'S NAME. WAS DRIVING MYSELF **CRAZY** KNOWING I HAD A WIFE I COULDN'T IDENTIFY. ONLY THING IS, I DON'T KNOW IF **SHE'S** ALIVE **EITHER**.

WITH FIVE YEARS OF MY LIFE MISSING, **ANYTHING** MIGHT BE POSSIBLE NOW. AFTER I FIND HER, I CAN CHECK ON MY BROTHERS... AND MOM AND DAD.

HOPE THEY DON'T MIND HAVING A GHOST WALK INTO THEIR LIVES.

I MISS EVERYONE. EVEN THOSE I CAN'T REMEMBER. HARD TO BELIEVE I'VE BEEN AWAY ONLY A FEW DAYS. IT SEEMS LIKE A LIFETIME AGO.

I DON'T KNOW IF I EVEN **HAVE** A LIFE ANYMORE. THAT'S THE SCARIEST PART.

SOME ANSWERS SEEM SO **DAMN** DIFFICULT.

LIKE, THAT LITTLE **FAT** GUY LAST NIGHT-- WHAT WAS **THAT** ALL ABOUT? AND WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THAT **FACE PAINT** OF HIS? I WAS SO SURE HE HAD SOME KNOWLEDGE OF **ME.**

WHAT I NEED TO **DO** IS GET THE FILE ON WANDA. SEE WHERE SHE LIVES. START FROM THERE. AND I KNOW JUST WHERE THE BOYS AT THE AGENCY **KEEP** THAT INFORMATION. AMUSING, HOW I USED TO BITCH AT THEM FOR INVADING PEOPLES' PRIVACY... THEY MIGHT HAVE THE MISSING CLUES I'M LOOKING FOR.

GETTING INTO THE BUILDING WILL BE A **CINCH** WITH THESE POWERS. I'M ALMOST LIKE A FRIGGIN' YOUNGBLOOD. WONDER IF THEY'RE STILL AROUND. THERE'S PROBABLY A HUNDRED OF 'EM, KNOWING THOSE GOVERNMENT STIFFS. "EXPLOIT AND OVERKILL," THE MOTTO OF **ANY** GOVERNMENT SYSTEM.

WE'VE GOT A FEW SCORES TO SETTLE, UNCLE SAM AND I. LIKE, NUMBER ONE...

...**HOW** DID I DIE. THAT ONE STILL HASN'T COME BACK TO ME. I'LL PUT **THAT** ONE ON THE BACK-BURNER...

...FOR **NOW.**

AN OBNOXIOUS PAIN IN THE ASS IS WHAT HE WAS. STILL, THERE WAS SOMETHING FAMILIAR ABOUT HIM. Ah WELL, HE'S THE LEAST OF MY PROBLEMS.

HAVE TO FIGURE THIS CRAP OUT ONE BIT AT A TIME. **FIRST,** I HAVE TO SEE **WANDA**... SHE'S THE ONLY REASON I'M EVEN **BACK.**

THEN, I'M GOING TO FIND HIM. THE SCUMBAG WHO'S MESSING WITH MY SO-CALLED LIFE.

FOR SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE IN RELIGION, I SURE GOT THROWN INTO A BIBLICAL NIGHTMARE.

DEMONS. SOULS. DEALS. LIES. **THAT'S** WHAT'S IN THE GREAT BEYOND, NOT SOME CUTE OLD MAN IN A BEARD.

THE TV EVANGELISTS WOULD HAVE HEART ATTACKS IF THEY KNEW WHAT LAY IN WAIT FOR THEM. GUESS THEY'LL BE GETTING THEIR JUST DUES, SAME AS I DID.

NOW THAT'D BE WORTH SEEING.

I HOPE THERE IS ANOTHER OPTION AT DEATH, THOUGH, BECAUSE GRANDMA BLAKE DOESN'T DESERVE WHAT I'VE GOT. HELL, **NO ONE** DESERVES WHAT I'VE GOT.

IT WAS A HELLUVA DEAL I MADE. "LET ME SEE MY WIFE AND YOU CAN HAVE MY SOUL." SOUNDED SIMPLE. I NEVER FACTORED IN THAT HE'D STRIP AWAY EVERYTHING I HAD. MY FACE. MY SKIN. AND HE SEEMS TO BE TOYING WITH MY MEMORIES. GIVING ME SELECTIVE RECALL. WELL, YOUR TIME WILL COME, DEVIL.

YOU'D BETTER BE PREPARED.

SOME-WHERE IN TIME...

HA HA HA

My personal mission is to make your **new** life a living **HELL!**

Yes, my dear friend, it wasn't by accident that you were picked to receive the **power**. Your life history made you the perfect choice.

How amusing... a hired killer now thinks he can have **morals**.

No, Al Simmons, morals are not a luxury we are granted. We do because we **have** to. That is enough.

Rhyme or reason are irrelevant. We must grow. Our **army** must grow. You've been selected to help speed up that growth. And in case you might need a little motivation, I've sent a few friends to keep an eye on you.

TRUST is not strong among us.

UNFORTUNATELY, you forgot to read the small print.

HAHAH HAHA

Yes, you and I made a simple deal...

CRIPES!! TWITCH, WHAT'S THE CHIEF THINKING OF?!

HE'S **BURYING** US UNDER THESE STUPID **REPORTS!** WHY'S HE KEEPING US OFF THE STREET? AFRAID WE MIGHT ACTUALLY **GET SOME RESULTS?!!**

HIM AND HIS **DAMN** TASK FORCE.

THEY AIN'T DONE **SNOT!**

I'M STUCK IN THE OFFICE, WITH THIS FRIGGIN' CHAIR FEELING MORE AND MORE LIKE A **PIMPLE** ON MY **BUTT!**

PLUS, I GOTTA LOOK AT **YOUR** UGLY MUG, TWITCH.

THANK YOU, SIR. I'LL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT.

BUT! ... NO PUN INTENDED...

...THAT STILL ISN'T SOLVING ANY OF OUR PROBLEMS.

YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW. WE GOT A PILE OF DEAD MAFIA WISE GUYS... **MINUS** THEIR HEARTS! AND EVEN THOUGH I AIN'T LOSING MUCH SLEEP OVER THEM, SOMEONE **SICK** IS RESPONSIBLE.

I DON'T **CARE** IF CRIME IS DOWN...

... WE WERE HIRED TO UPHOLD THE **LAW.** I'LL BE DAMNED IF I'M GONNA LET SOME PENCIL-NECK POLITICIAN-WANNABE SLOW ME DOWN.

Uh, SIR...

"... I DO SO ENJOY BEING WITH YOU IN YOUR **FESTIVE** MOODS."

♪ ♫ DEE-LOOP-DEE-LOO! DEE-LOOP-DEE-LIE! ♪

I KNOW A HERO... WHO'S ♪ GOING TO **DIE!!** ♪

HEE HEE

I'M A POET AND I DON'T EVEN **KNOW** IT.

BETTER YET...

... I'M THE **VIOLATOR!**

AND IF I DON'T KILL YOU TODAY... I'LL **TRY-IT-LATER!**

dang, I'm good.

THE C.I.A.-- NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS...

GOT MY WIFE'S FILE. THIS SHOULD GIVE ME SOME ANSWERS.

JUST NEED TO TAKE CARE OF ONE SMALL DETAIL.

IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT, *LINDA*, WHY DON'T WE CALL IT A NIGHT.

PERHAPS I CAN BUY YOU A DRINK?

Uh... NO THANK YOU, MR. MILLER, MY HUSBAND IS WAITING FOR ME.

AND HOW *IS* THE NEW HUBBY, *ANY-WAYS*. SURELY HE WON'T MIND IF YOU'RE NOT *HOME* RIGHT ON TIME.

ACTUALLY, SIR, HE... uh... NEEDS ME TO HELP COOK DINNER.

AT THIS LATE HOUR? NOT MUCH OF A *MAN* IF HE JUST SITS AROUND WAITING FOR YOU TO COOK.

SPEAKING OF COOKING, WHY WASTE THOSE BEAUTIFUL LIPS ON *FOOD*, WHEN I CAN THINK OF A NUMBER OF THINGS I'D *MUCH* RATHER SEE THEM DO.

Hmmmm.

PLEASE, MR. MILLER, I CAN'T--!

OH YES YOU *CAN*. BUT NOT TONIGHT, I GUESS.

OKAY, GATHER YOUR STUFF. I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING. AND WEAR THAT *CUTE* LITTLE BLUE OUTFIT I LIKE SO MUCH.

HEY!!

WHO'S BEEN *SCREWING* WITH MY *FILES*?

B
ILE

C
FILE

GHK!

YOU LISTEN! AND YOU LISTEN GOOD!

WORD IS THAT SINCE YOUR DIVORCE YOU HAVEN'T PAID A PENNY IN ALIMONY OR CHILD SUPPORT.

I HIGHLY RECOMMEND THAT YOU CORRECT THIS OVERSIGHT QUICKLY...

...BECAUSE IF I HAVE TO COME BACK AGAIN, SHE'LL GET THE MONEY FROM YOUR LIFE INSURANCE POLICY.

DO WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER?

SURE.

GOOD.

THERE ARE SOME OF US WHO WOULD GIVE OUR LIVES TO HAVE A WIFE OR FAMILY.

OH, YEAH.

IF YOU EVER TOUCH YOUR SECRETARY AGAIN, YOU'LL NEVER USE THOSE HANDS AGAIN.

THUD

THEY ALWAYS SAID YOU WERE SCUM, BILLY.

UNH?!

HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME?

WHERE ARE YOU, DAMMIT?!!

WHO ARE YOU?!

PRAY YOU NEVER LEARN.

YES!

THAT'S IT! Become evil! Vicious! Violent!!

NaNaNaNaNaNa

SHE STARTED A SCHOLAR-SHIP IN MY NAME, TO HELP THE UNDER-PRIVILEGED.

SHE ALWAYS DID HAVE A BIG HEART. BUT WHERE IS SHE LIVING?

QUEENS?

WHY WOULD SHE MOVE THERE WHEN HER PARENTS LIVED ON STATEN ISLAND? MUST BE A REASON WHY...

WHAT'S THIS?!

NO!

GOD SAVE ME, NO.

BLAKE, W

IT CAN'T BE.

9:4:3:2

QUEENS, THE NEXT DAY...

A TWENTY-FIVE MINUTE COMMUTE FROM MANHATTAN STANDS A NONDESCRIPT HOUSE. WHITE FENCE. PORCH. THE PERFECT LITTLE HIDEWAY--

--AND THE HOME OF **WANDA BLAKE**, WIDOW OF **LT. COL. AL SIMMONS.**

TIME TO CHANGE INTO HUMAN FLESH AGAIN. WISH I COULD LOOK LIKE MYSELF. BUT THESE POWERS SEEM TO HAVE A MIND OF THEIR OWN SOMETIMES.

I CAN'T EVEN **CHANGE** MY APPEARANCE. KEEP TURNING INTO THIS DAMN WHITE GUY.

WORSE YET...

...I LOOK LIKE SOME CALIFORNIA BEACH BUM.

AND OF ALL THE HAIR COLORS-- **WHY BLONDE?!**

THAT'S IT, KEEP JOKING. THEN MAYBE YOUR NERVES WILL SETTLE DOWN.

OR AT LEAST YOUR HANDS WILL STOP SHAKING.

FEEL LIKE SOME STUPID SCHOOL KID GOING OUT ON HIS FIRST DATE. NOW THERE'S A JOKE, WE DATED THREE YEARS AND WERE MARRIED FIVE...

HAVE TO GO SLOW. FEELS LIKE I'VE BEEN GONE ONLY A FEW DAYS, BUT FIVE **YEARS** HAVE PASSED FOR HER. HOPE SHE'LL REMEMBER.

HOPE I CAN COUNT ON HER.

WELL... HERE GOES EVERYTHING.

BZZZT

BE RIGHT WITH YOU!

GRRRRRRRR

GOOD DAY! MAY I HELP YOU?

MY GOD. SHE'S EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL.

Uh... HELLO... I'M FROM THE... THE...

WHAT'S THE MATTER? IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE SEEN A *GHOST.*

EXCUSE MY APPEARANCE...! I WAS JUST TRYING THIS DRESS ON TO SEE IF IT FITS. BIG BUSINESS PARTY TONIGHT. *YOU* KNOW THE KIND. LOTS OF PEOPLE. LOTS OF FOOD. MINIMAL FUN. BUT IF I *DON'T* GO, THEN THE WHOLE OFFICE GETS UPTIGHT.

SO WHAT DO YOU THINK OF IT?

YOU'RE GORGEO... I MEAN, IT'S GORGEOUS.

SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF

THANKS.

ANYWAY, YOU RANG THE BELL. SO WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF

ALL RIGHT NOW. YOU'VE ALREADY GONE OVER THIS A DOZEN TIMES. HIT HER WHERE SHE'S GOT A SOFT SPOT.

Uh...

I'M FROM THE S.P.C.A., AND WE'RE GOING AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD, CHECKING TO SEE IF THE DOGS HAVE BEEN LICENSED. .WE'RE HAVING A SPECIAL THIS WEEK WHERE YOU CAN RENEW THE LICENSE FOR TWELVE DOLLARS, OR REGISTER FOR FIFTEEN DOLLARS IF TH... FIRST TIME. ALSO, WE... KNOW IF...

MAMA! MAMA!

WHAT?!

WHY YOU GO, MAMA?

EXCUSE ME.

SWEETY, MOMMY HAD TO GET THE DOOR. A MAN WANTS TO KNOW IF YOUR DOGGIE IS OKAY.

A GIRL!!

THE FILE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT A CHILD.

HOW CAN IT BE...

WE COULDN'T...

I THOUGHT SHE COULDN'T...

I'M SORRY. SHE'S ONLY FIFTEEN MONTHS OLD AND STILL AT THAT CLINGY STAGE. EVERY TIME I LEAVE THE ROOM SHE THINKS I'M ABANDONING HER.

SILLY GIRL. MOMMY WOULDN'T LEAVE YOU.

WE ALWAYS WANTED CHILDREN, BUT SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT. DOCTORS SAID IT WAS NO USE.

BUT IT WAS ME!

GODDAMMIT, IT WAS ME!!

NOW, WHERE WERE WE AGAIN...?

I COULDN'T GIVE HER WHAT SHE WANTED MOST...

...WHAT I WANTED...

...WHAT...

UNNHH

TERRY!

TERRY! QUICK!! GET DOWN HERE NOW! I NEED HELP!!

I'M COMING!

MAMA, MAN FALL DOWN! tee-hee-hee

NYNNHH--!

...I THINK HE'S COMING TO.

WHERE AM I? NO! JESUS, THE FILE WAS TRUE! TERRY DID MARRY WANDA...

HEY, BUDDY, TAKE IT EASY NOW.

YOU OKAY?

DO YOU WANT US TO PHONE A DOCTOR OR SOMETHING?

MAYBE I COULD CALL YOUR FAMILY, OR YOUR WIFE...

I DON'T HAVE A WIFE ANYMORE.

SORRY TO HEAR THAT.

YEAH... ME TOO. KILLS ME EVERY TIME I SEE HER.

SHE MUST HAVE BEEN REALLY SPECIAL.

MORE THAN YOU'LL KNOW. THING IS, I DON'T KNOW WHY I LOST HER.
IT'S OKAY, BUDDY ...
...WANDA LOST HER HUSBAND FIVE YEARS AGO, TOO. KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.
I'M SORRY.
ALL OF US WERE. HE WAS THE BEST FRIEND I HAD.
arf!
BUT SOMEHOW THROUGH THAT TRAGEDY, WANDA AND I FOUND EACH OTHER. TOOK US A LONG TIME, THOUGH.
LIKE A MAN OUT OF TIME.
PARDON?
NOTHING...
SO YOU SEE, WE'VE ALL BEEN THROUGH LIFE'S WRINGER. AND EVEN THOUGH THE HURT DOESN'T COMPLETELY GO AWAY, THE MEMORIES OF GOOD TIMES ARE YOURS TO HOLD ON TO.
WELL, IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, OUR DOG ***LIKES*** YOU... A ***LOT!*** SHE WAS MY LATE HUSBAND'S DOG, AND SHE HASN'T WARMED UP TO ***ANYONE*** SINCE HE DIED. AS A MATTER OF FACT, SHE HATES EVERY-ONE... EVEN TERRY. YOU MUST HAVE A KIND SOUL.
SAY, HOW'RE YOU FEELING, ANYWAY?
NOT ANY MORE.
Oh, DON'T BE SILLY!
YOU STRIKE ME AS A VERY STRONG PERSON. TAKE THAT GIFT AND SHARE IT WITH OTHERS. I'M SURE YOUR EX-WIFE DOESN'T WANT YOU TO STOP BEING YOURSELF.
SHE'S RE-MARRIED, HAS A FAMILY NOW. EVEN THOUGH I LOVE HER MORE THAN EVER, I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S RIGHT FOR ME TO **INVADE** THAT HAPPINESS.
MY WIFE... I MEAN MY EX-WIFE... DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME ANYMORE.
IF I TRY TO TELL HER MY FEELINGS, I THINK I'D RUIN HER LIFE. SHE-- SHE SEEMS REALLY HAPPY NOW. I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT THAT.
SHE'S AS HAPPY AND BEAUTIFUL AS YOU SEEM TO BE.
WHAT A SWEET THING TO SAY. THANK YOU.
YOU'RE WELCOME. SORRY IF I RUINED YOUR DAY.

AS NIGHT FALLS, HIS PAIN ONLY MOUNTS.

WHY??

WHY ARE YOU TORTURING ME?! WHAT KIND OF SADISTIC PLEASURE ARE YOU GETTING FROM THIS??

YOU WANT MY SOUL?

THEN COME GET IT!

JUST TRY AND GET IT!!

I WAS GOING TO GIVE IT TO YOU WILLINGLY! DO YOU HEAR!!

I JUST WANTED MY WIFE! CAN'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?? I DON'T WANT THESE POWERS... I NEVER ASKED FOR THEM OR ANYTHING ELSE! I ONLY WANTED ONE THING... TO SEE MY WIFE!

YOU COULD HAVE HAD MY SOUL. YOU COULD HAVE HAD ANYTHING!

BUT YOU'VE LIED AND CHEATED FOR THE LAST TIME, I PROMISE YOU!

YOU'VE STOLEN **WANDA** FROM ME... TAKEN MY FACE, MY VERY **EXISTENCE** AWAY. AND YOU EVEN HAD TO PROVE IT WAS **ME** WHO COULDN'T PRODUCE CHILDREN.

YOU **KNEW** SHE WANTED A CHILD MORE THAN ANYTHING. NOW SHE **HAS** THAT CHILD-- HOW CAN I ETHICALLY GET IN THE MIDDLE OF **THAT?!**

IF YOU'RE GOING TO SCREW **ME**, I'M GOING TO SCREW **YOU!**

YOU WANT MY **SOUL**-- THEN COME **GET IT!** LET'S SEE WHO'S GOT THE **POWER!**

8:8:2:1

YOU SCUMBAG.

AS IF ON CUE...

YO! *MR. SPAWN-DUDE!* REMEMBER ME?? WE DIDN'T GET A CHANCE TO SHARE OUR *COMMON* INTERESTS.

JH?

LIKE KILLING!

AND MAIMING!

AND SLAUGHTER-ING!

AND DESTROY-ING!

ALL THE *THINGS* YA DID WHEN YA WERE WITH THE GOVERNMENT? *REMEMBER* ?

YOU AND I COULD HAVE A MILLION LAUGHS TOGETHER

HA HA HA

I DON'T KNOW WHO OR WHAT YOU ARE... BUT I GUARANTEE YOU'VE PICKED THE WRONG TIME!

IF YOU'RE FROM THE SAME HELLPIT I CAME FROM... THEN I'VE GOT A MESSAGE TO SEND BACK TO YOUR BOSS!

GOOD! THEY SAID YOU HAD A LOT OF SPUNK!

SO LET'S SEE HOW MUCH HEART YOU HAVE!

GKH!

Hmmm...

THAT WAS SURE SIMPLE!

THE MASTER'LL BE PLEASED.

I LIVE TO SERVE THE MASTER.

DON'T KNOW WHY HE WASTED SO MUCH TIME ON THIS GUY. I HEARD HE HAD SOME SPECIAL POWERS.

OBVIOUSLY, NOT ENOUGH.

I'M TIRED OF THE OTHERS ALWAYS BEING AFRAID OF SOMEONE *ELSE*.

IT'S THE VIOLATOR THEY SHOULD FEAR MOST.

NOT SOME SOFT FLESH-AND-BONES OF A MERE *HUMAN!*

VIOLATOR.

WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BEING HUMAN?

NEXT ISSUE:

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE ON EARTH!

ISSUE 4

FOR THE PAST WEEK OR SO, LT. COLONEL **AL SIMMONS** HAS BEEN TRYING TO COPE WITH HIS SO-CALLED **REALITY.**

THAT REALITY INCLUDES HIM BEING BROUGHT BACK FROM THE DEAD; SELLING HIS SOUL; BEING GIVEN WHAT SEEM TO BE UNLIMITED POWERS; AND GETTING SHOT FIVE YEARS INTO HIS FUTURE, AS A WHITE MAN... WHEN HE IS **BLACK.**

FATE HAS NOT BEEN KIND TO MR. SIMMONS. WITH THE ADVENT OF HIS DEATH BECOMING A DISTANT MEMORY, HIS LIFE CONTINUED FORWARD. THERE'S THE IRONY.

HIS WHOLE REASON FOR RETURNING FROM THE GRAVE WAS THE UNRELENTING LOVE HE HAD FOR HIS WIFE. EARLIER IN THE DAY HE SAW HER AGAIN. THE DEVIL HAD KEPT HIS END OF THE BARGAIN.

BUT WHILE SEEING HIS WIFE, HE ALSO LEARNED THAT SHE WAS HAPPILY **REMARRIED**. WORSE THAN THAT... THE ONE THING SHE HAD ALWAYS WANTED, THE ONE THING AL COULD NEVER GIVE HER, HAD BEEN DELIVERED.

A **CHILD.**

THAT MEANT THAT **SIMMONS** HAD BEEN THE PROBLEM. NOW HE FEELS LIKE LESS OF A MAN.

NO WIFE.

NO IDENTITY.

NO PRIDE.

HIS HEART HAS BEEN TORN APART BOTH **EMOTIONALLY...**

...AND **PHYSICALLY.**

LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN.

BUT THIS TIME, TRY AND DO SOME REAL DAMAGE.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

I JUST *DON'T* BELIEVE IT!

WHO GAVE YOU SUCH POWERS?! SINCE WHEN DID *HUMANS* BEGIN TO RATE? THEY'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOO *FRAGILE* FOR THIS! I JUST *DON'T* BELIEVE IT!

SAY SOMETHING **NEW**, SCHOOL-BOY.

HE DOESN'T NEED HIS HEART.

THUM THUM THUM THUM

HE DOESN'T NEED A HEART!!

WHAT'S GOING ON?! I THOUGHT *I* HAD THE POWER. YOU SAID I'D BE STRONGER THAN *SPAWN!!*

SPAWN CONTINUES HIS SILENCE, FOR WHAT **DOES** A MAN SAY TO AN OFFSPRING OF THE PIT OF HELL.

THE MASTER AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE *WORDS*.

MAYBE THE OBVIOUS.

HOW CAN HE SURVIVE WITHOUT HIS BLOODY ***HEART?!*** NO ONE WARNED ME. I THOUGHT THIS WAS GOING TO BE AN EASY ASSIGNMENT.

NOT ***THIS*** SCUM-SUCKING BAG OF FLESH.

8:6:6:4

I BELIEVE THIS BELONGS TO ME.

THUM THUM THU

THAT'S BETTER.

NOW PAY ATTENTION, DEMON...

I KNOW YOUR MASTER. THE SCUM'S SCREWING WITH MY LIFE, TOO.

HE SEEMS TO **ENJOY** RUINING PEOPLE'S LIVES...

...AND FOR THE LIFE OF ME I CAN'T UNDERSTAND **WHY.** BUT IF HE'S MESSING WITH **YOU,** AND CHANGING WHATEVER DEAL YOU'VE MADE... THAT'S **YOUR** PROBLEM.

I'M STILL TRYING TO DEAL WITH **MINE.**

UNFORTUNATELY, YOU THINK THINGS CAN'T GET WORSE FOR YOU... **WRONG!!** YOU'VE GOT AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM TO TAKE CARE OF.

NAMELY **ME.**

'CAUSE I'LL BE **GOD DAMNED** IF ANYONE'S GOING TO RIP **MY** HEART OUT.

...AND NOT PAY.

KGHK!

THE FORCE OF SPAWN'S BLAST CARVES A HOLE THROUGH THE VIOLATOR THE SIZE OF A BASKETBALL. FRAGMENTS OF BLUISH, ROTTING CHUNKS VOMIT THEMSELVES IN A HELTER-SKELTER PATTERN. THE BRICK WALLS NOW HAVE A MURAL OF CRIMSON GORE.

AS THE BLOOD RUNS SOFTLY DOWN THE WALL, SPAWN IS TAKEN ABACK FOR A MOMENT. NOT BY THE BLOOD; HE HAS SEEN AND SPILLED FAR TOO MUCH. NOR IS IT THE FORCE OF HIS POWER. IT IS SIMPLY THAT ALL THIS EVEN EXISTS.

HOW... CAN HE REPAIR A DISMEMBERED HEART?

WHY... DOES HE EVEN HAVE SUCH POWERS?

WHEN... IS ALL THE MADNESS GOING TO END?

WHERE... DOES HE GO, NOW THAT HE HAS LOST EVERYTHING?

THE QUESTIONS RICOCHET THROUGH HIS BRAIN... AND THE SCARIEST PART FOR HIM IS THAT HE IS ALMOST GETTING USED TO ALL THE INSANITY AROUND HIM.

YOU IDIOT!!

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE THAT CAN SURVIVE AN ORGAN TRANSPLANT. *I* HAD THE POWER LONG BEFORE *YOU* STUMBLED UPON IT!

SO WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

MY POINT, DEAR BOY, IS-- IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO PLAY THE OLD EYE FOR AN EYE GAME, YOU'RE A *BIGGER* FOOL THAN I *THOUGHT!*

ALLOW ME TO *DEMONSTRATE!*

SO WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

LISTEN, I'M NOT HERE TO GAME-PLAY. I'M HERE TO KEEP YOU IN *LINE*-- MAKE SURE YOU DON'T *STRAY*.

WHY HE'S MAKING SUCH A BIG DEAL OUT OF YOU, I *STILL* HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT.

BUT *UNTIL* SUCH TIME, IT'S MY JOB TO SHOW YOU THE *ROPES*.

JUST HOPE I DON'T *STRANGLE* YOU WITH THEM!

NOW WOULDN'T THAT BE A *PITY!*

HAHAHAHAHAHA

HA! NICE SHOOTING! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO HIT THE *TARGET*, CHUMP.

ZAK!!

LET ME GIVE YOU A POINTER--

--LIKE *THIS!!*

CHUMP

TICK!

NO! YOU TAKE THIS!

WHASH

AND THAT!

OW.

SHIK

ENOUGH

BIG DEAL! I DIDN'T NEED THAT ARM ANYWAY.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?!

UH!

I gave the both of you far too much credit. It is not necessary to mutilate each other... when neither of you can die...

Like a pair of jealous siblings, you don't realize the two of you are part of the same family.

And like it or not, I'm your DADDY!!

And like a good parent, I can see I need to share some of my insight, so you two boys'll know exactly what's going on.

DESTINY and DAMNATION ...you control neither. So, even though you struggle to make sense of what's happening...

...it doesn't matter because I run both your lives!

GO TO HELL!

BELIEVE ME, SPAWN, HE ALREADY HAS.

HAHAHA Vigor and humor!

What an unlikely combo. You boys do warm my soul!

Don't be so surprised. I do have a soul... and eight billion others! Nearly enough to satisfy my needs!

Evil can be very addictive, especially after death. The accumulation of the souls of the damned can have only one outcome: the Destruction of God!

Yes, Simmons, there is a God! For an athiest like yourself that might be a shock. But with all you've been through, I'm sure it's not such a hard concept to follow.

JESUS!

Call him what you will.

He is now your enemy!

And it was Your choice.

I don't have the power to turn people away from God. They have to do that willingly. But once they do I need to seize that moment and make them mine. Once I have them, my powers can and will control them forever.

Which is where you come in, my dear Spawn.

My army of evil is not quite complete. I need billions more, for the forces of good are naturally quite strong. To ensure my eventual victory, though, I need agents to do my bidding. Your past human life made you the perfect candidate -- young, brash, destructive, ruthless, arrogant... and a hired killer. There's not too many of you around. As one of my agents, you needed powers to set you apart. That was simple. But I'd be a fool to make it limitless.

You're wise enough to have sensed the draining of the power. If not, let me explain. The more you use your energy, the faster you come to a second death. The slower you use it, the less chance you have of stopping evil around you. Either way, I eventually end up owning your soul!

The only choice you have is... how fast you willing to give it?

HAHA HAHA

hee hee

All this because of some petty little emotion called **Love**.

You humans are **Soooo** predictable.

So you see, **my** spawn from hell--I can't lose. It's either the depletion of your power--which leads to your **death**--which leads to losing your soul to the darkness...

...**and** simultaneously **killing** the so-called **bad guys**, which helps build my army that much **faster**...

OR...

...you do **nothing**! Just stand by and let the **evil** and **ugliness** prosper here on Earth, while your emotions grow **colder** as you justify to yourself why you needn't **do** anything to those who prey on the **innocent**.

Now that you have been fairly **warned**, let me offer my **assistance**.

I'll give you the new **arm**.

No sense **you** wasting any more power, **my child**.

HEY!

What about me?

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR MY EFFORT!

LOOK, BOSS, I THINK I DID A HELLUVA JOB HERE!

... KEPT A EYE ON SOME OF THE CRIMINAL ACTIVITY...

...MADE THE COPS THINK THERE'S A LUNATIC ON THE LOOSE...

...EVEN PUT A BIT OF FEAR INTO SPAWN'S HEART.

SPEAKIN' OF WHICH--

-- NO ONE WARNED ME OF HIS POWERS WHEN I GOT THIS ASSIGNMENT --!

I MEAN, LOOK AT THIS ARM! NOT A PRETTY SIGHT!

AND THIS HOLE IN MY BELLY -- IT'S WORSE THAN A BLOODY ULCER!

Silence!

Gulp

You have failed **miserably!** It is incompetents like you that make my battle against the God so laborious! I sometimes think that there are **traitors** among us!

You, Violator, are a **sad** excuse for Hell!

You, my erratic child, are being **grounded!**

I made you in my **image**... told you to keep a watchful eye on **Spawn**. Prod him if called for.

But you **abused** those powers, going on a **killing spree** with no agenda in mind. Now, the New York criminals are being **cautious**.

Paranoid thieves serve me no purpose!

OOOF!

For now, I'm **through** with the two of you!

HEY! I CAN'T CHANGE FORMS!

Oh GREAT!

JUST GREAT!!

GO AHEAD, KICK ME WHILE I'M DOWN! THIS IS JUST FRIGGIN' PERFECT! I WORK MY BUTT OFF TO TRY AND PLEASE YOU AND WHAT DO I GET FOR MY TROUBLES...

SQUAT, THAT'S WHAT!

THERE'S JUST NO PLEASING SOME PEOPLE!!

BUT THAT'S OKAY. I DON'T MIND BEING SHORT, FAT AND UGLY!

AS A MATTER OF FACT, I KINDA ENJOY IT! SO IF THIS IS THE WORST YOU CAN DO, I'M NOT IMPRESSED!

WHO WANTS TO LIVE IN HELL ANYWAYS. MAKES ME SWEAT LIKE A PIG. AND THIS SPAWN GUY.

PFFFT!!!

BIG HAIRY DEAL.

YOU CALL THAT AN AGENT?! DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH.

HMMPF!

THIS SUCKS THE BIG ONE!

WITH THE BATTLE ENDING SO QUICKLY, THE POLICE ARE ONCE AGAIN TOO LATE TO INTERVENE.

THAT SUIT'S SPAWN'S NEEDS, UNTIL HE SORTS OUT THE DIZZYING EVENTS SURROUNDING HIS NEW LIFE, BEING UNKNOWN AND UNDETECTED WILL BE HIS ONLY SOURCE OF COMFORT.

A HAT AND TRENCH-COAT, REMOVED FROM THE BACK OF A CAR, SERVE TO DISGUISE HIM.

HE IS NOW NOTHING MORE THAN A TWO-BIT **THIEF**, HE THINKS, WANDERING THE LATE-NIGHT STREETS IN SEARCH OF PEACE, OF SOME SEMBLANCE OF SANITY.

POWER.

TO USE OR **NOT** TO USE; THAT IS THE QUESTION.

IF HE CAN'T DECIDE, MAYBE THE FATES WILL.

ROB, **LOOK!** IT'S THAT NEW **SUPER-HERO!**

RIGHT ON, MAN! LET'S CHECK HIM **OUT!**

COOL! I DIDN'T THINK HE REALLY EXISTED!

I SAW HIM **FIRST!**

HOW?

H-HOW DID YOU KNOW?

HEY MISTER! WATCH OUT!

AWW COOL, MAN! LOOK AT HIM, ERIK!

UH?

IT'S THAT DRAGON DUDE FROM CHICAGO!

I TOLD YOU HE WAS RAD!

HE'S BETTER THAN THOSE YOUNGBLOOD! I BET HE COULD TAKE BEDROCK, EASY.

NOT!

BEDROCK'S WAY TOUGH. AIN'T NO ONE CAN TOUCH HIM.

GIMME A BREAK! THE 'ROCK IS A SISSY. HE STILL LIVES AT HOME WITH HIS MOM.

YEAH, WELL, SO DO YOU, HOME-BOY.

BUT I'M NOT A 'BLOOD.

HEROES AIN'T SUPPOSE TO BE NORMAL. THEY'RE SUPPOSE TO BE BETTER.

THAT'S WHY THEY'RE SO FAMOUS.

"BESIDES, WHO WANTS TO BE *NORMAL* ANYWAY."

NOOO!

2:36 A.M. THE CALM SILENCE OF SLEEP IS SHATTERED AS THE SOUL OF ANOTHER POOR VICTIM IS DRAWN FURTHER INTO PLAY.

WANDA, WHAT *IS* IT?! A DREAM?

AL! IT WAS **AL!** I SAW HIM ALIVE, B-BUT HE WAS ***DIFFERENT*** SOMEHOW--***CHANGED***. HE WAS CALLING TO ME, ASKING FOR HELP--***BEGGING*** FOR IT!

IT WAS ALMOST AS IF-- AS *IF*--

Oh, ***NEVER MIND***. YOU DON'T...

PLEASE, HONEY, TELL ME. I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO JUST ***FORGET*** HIM.

WELL, IT WAS ALMOST AS IF HE KNEW I WAS THERE BUT I COULDN'T ***DO*** ANYTHING. AND THEN HE STARTED TO ***CRY***, HURT THAT I DIDN'T WANT TO COME TO HIS SIDE. AND THEN...

Oh ***GOD***, I THINK I'M GOING ***CRAZY***.

I DON'T KNOW ***WHY*** I KEEP DREAMING THESE THINGS. I WISH I COULD STOP...

BUT THIS... IT FELT SO ***REAL***.

AL SEEMED SO REAL!

I'LL BE SORRY TO SEE YOU LEAVING US, *BILLY.*

EVERYONE HERE AT THE INSTITUTE HAS SO ENJOYED YOUR COMPANY, BUT WE ALL KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME. WE JUST DIDN'T KNOW THAT IT'D BE SO ***SOON.*** YOU MUST BE PLEASED WITH YOUR LAWYER'S EFFORTS. HE SOUNDED QUITE PLEASED THAT THE COURT UPHELD HIS PETITION OF APPEAL, CITING SOME OBSCURE CASE FROM THE 1930's. THOUGH I DON'T PRETEND TO KNOW THAT MUCH ABOUT THE LAW, WE CAN BOTH FEEL VINDICATED. THE SYSTEM DOES INDEED WORK.

IT SADDENS ME TO HAVE TO SAY THAT THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST DAY WITH US. HOWEVER, WITH THE JUDGE'S REDUCTION OF YOUR TERM ON THAT ***TECHNICALITY,*** AND DR. REYNOLDS' TESTIMONY STATING YOUR COMPETENCE, THERE'S NO MORE TO BE SAID. THE SIX AND A HALF YEARS YOU SPENT HERE AT THE INSTITUTE WENT BY FAR TOO QUICKLY.

TOMORROW, YOU BEGIN A ***NEW LIFE.*** AN OFFICER WILL PICK YOU UP AND TAKE YOU TO THE COURT HOUSE, TO SIGN THE FINAL PAPERS.

UNFORTUNATELY, I MUST ***WARN*** YOU, BILLY. THERE ARE FORCES OUTSIDE THAT DON'T WISH YOU ANY KIND OF HAPPINESS. THEY MIGHT EVEN TRY AND BRING BACK SOME OF YOUR BAD DREAMS. YOU WON'T ALLOW THAT, WILL YOU? WE ***BOTH*** KNOW THAT YOU'RE ***NOT*** THE SAME PERSON YOU ***USED*** TO BE.

YOU ARE CURED, **BILLY KINCAID.**

OTHERS MAY NOT WANT TO BELIEVE THAT, BUT THE STAFF AND I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED WITH YOUR ***MODEL BEHAVIOR.*** ALWAYS THE ***GENTLEMAN.***

YES, YOUR TIME HERE HAS BEEN ***SO*** REWARDING.

SO UNEVENTFUL.

SO THERAPUTIC.

SO CONVINCING.

Uh, SIR, PLEASE KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.

BEFORE YOU GO, THE JUDGE WANTED ME TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU'RE *NOT* TO HAVE ANY CONTACT WITH THE *DEAD GIRL'S PARENTS.*

I HAVE ASSURED THEM TO PUT THEIR WORRIES ASIDE... AND THAT THEY WILL HAVE YOUR *FULL CO-OPERATION.*

DO YOU UNDERSTAND, BILLY?

BILLY ?!

YES... WELL... LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE OVERWHELMED BY THE WHOLE PROCEDURE. THAT'S *PERFECTLY* UNDERSTANDABLE.

I MUST ADMIT THIS WAS ALL RATHER SUDDEN FOR *ME,* TOO.

BUT WE ARE *ALL* SATISFIED BY THE END RESULT.

SO, I GUESS THAT JUST ABOUT *WRAPS THINGS UP.* DR. REYNOLDS AND I WILL HAVE OUR REPORTS AVAILABLE IN THE MORNING.

I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW AT EIGHT O'CLOCK SHARP.

Uh...

...IS THERE ANYTHING *YOU'D* LIKE TO SAY, BILLY?

I DON'T CARE *HOW* SATISFIED EVERYONE IS, THAT MAN'S A FRIGGIN' *SICKO!* SLAUGHTERED THE KID SO BAD IT TOOK SIX EXPERTS TO FINALLY IDENTIFY THE GIRL.

WE NAILED HIS ASS FOR JUST THE ONE MURDER. I'M NOT HAPPY, TWITCH, BUT IT'S THE ONLY TIME WE CAUGHT 'IM *FLAT.*

JUST *LOOK* AT HIS EYES...

"... AND TELL ME THAT MAN'S CURED!"

time.

tomorrow it becomes my friend.

but i never forgot. never stopped thinking about it. yes, i have been so patient and understanding.

tomorrow i live again. i have been such a good boy. always doing what i'm told. always being a gentleman.

but it was well worth the wait.

i remember those good times.

... it was all so simple.

so easy.

the children do love their sweets.

ICE CREAM

so do i.

i like lots of variety.

terri. stuart. peter. david. suzy.

i hate that i didn't get all the names

you scream. i scream. we all scream for ice cream.

but i know the number... twenty-seven.

those were such fun times. i will never forget.

not ever.

Ah, *BILLY*. NICE TO SEE YOU *SMILING*. GLAD YOU'RE SO HAPPY ABOUT YOUR IMPENDING *FREEDOM*.

I'LL SAY GOOD-BYE TO THE STAFF FOR YOU.

you scream. i scream. we all scream for ice cream.

Huh?

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!!

JUST A LITTLE RHYME BILLY TAUGHT EVERYONE WHILE HE WAS HERE. RATHER *CUTE*, DON'T YOU THINK?

I DON'T FIND ANYTHING *CUTE* ABOUT THAT WALKING BUTCHER!

I ASSURE YOU, DETECTIVE...

...THE PSYCHIATRISTS HAVE ALL AGREED...

SCREW YOUR PSYCHIA-TRISTS!!

THAT MAN'S A *FREAK!* AND IF YOU THINK THAT SITTING BEHIND *LOCKED* DOORS FOR SIX YEARS IS A *CURE*, THEN YOU GUYS ARE EVEN *BIGGER* IDIOTS THAN I *THOUGHT!*

WHAT HE DID TO LITTLE AMANDA JENNINGS *WASN'T* AN ISOLATED EVENT.

OVER *TWENTY KIDS* DISAPPEARED FROM HIS TOWN.

I DIDN'T SEE *THAT* IN YOUR REPORT!

YOU DON'T THINK HE'S CURED... YOU'RE JUST TOO DAMNED AFRAID TO BE *AROUND* HIM ANY MORE!

I'M SORRY YOU *FEEL* THAT WAY, DETECTIVE--BUT YOU CAN PUNISH HIM ONLY WHEN HE'S BEEN *CONVICTED*. YOU *ARE* FAMILIAR WITH THE CONCEPT OF *LAW*, YES?

NOW, IF YOU'LL BOTH *EXCUSE* ME, I HAVE *PATIENTS* WAITING...

OH, DO ME A SMALL *FAVOR*, BILLY. I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU CLEAN-SHAVEN TOMORROW. THAT GROWTH IS *SO* UNFLATTERING.

THE LAW.

IT'S SOMETHING DETECTIVE **SAM BURKE** UNDERSTANDS FAR TOO WELL. IN HIS SIXTEEN YEARS ON THE FORCE, IT'S BEEN THE ONLY CONSTANT IN HIS LIFE.

RAPISTS. JUNKIES. WACKOS. MURDER-ERS.

HE'S SHARED HUNDREDS OF EVENINGS WITH **ALL** OF THEM. SOME NIGHTS GAVE POSITIVE RESULTS, OTHERS WENT **DEADLY.** HE LOST A PARTNER TO ONE OF THOSE.

BUT, THROUGH ALL THE OBSCENE SITUATIONS HE'S BEEN SUCKED INTO, BURKE'S NEVER LOST SIGHT OF WHAT MATTERS MOST: **THE LAW**. TO UPHOLD AND PROTECT. TO PROTECT AND SERVE. **AT ALL COSTS.**

HE HAS NEVER WAVERED.

CRIPES!

EVEN TO THE POINT OF FEELING STRANGLED BY HIS OWN MORAL CONVIC-TIONS

MORALS HAVE BE-COME ONLY A CAREER HAZARD.

HE'S NEVER MADE ROOM FOR OBSTA-CLES.

YES, HE'S COURTED THE LAW.

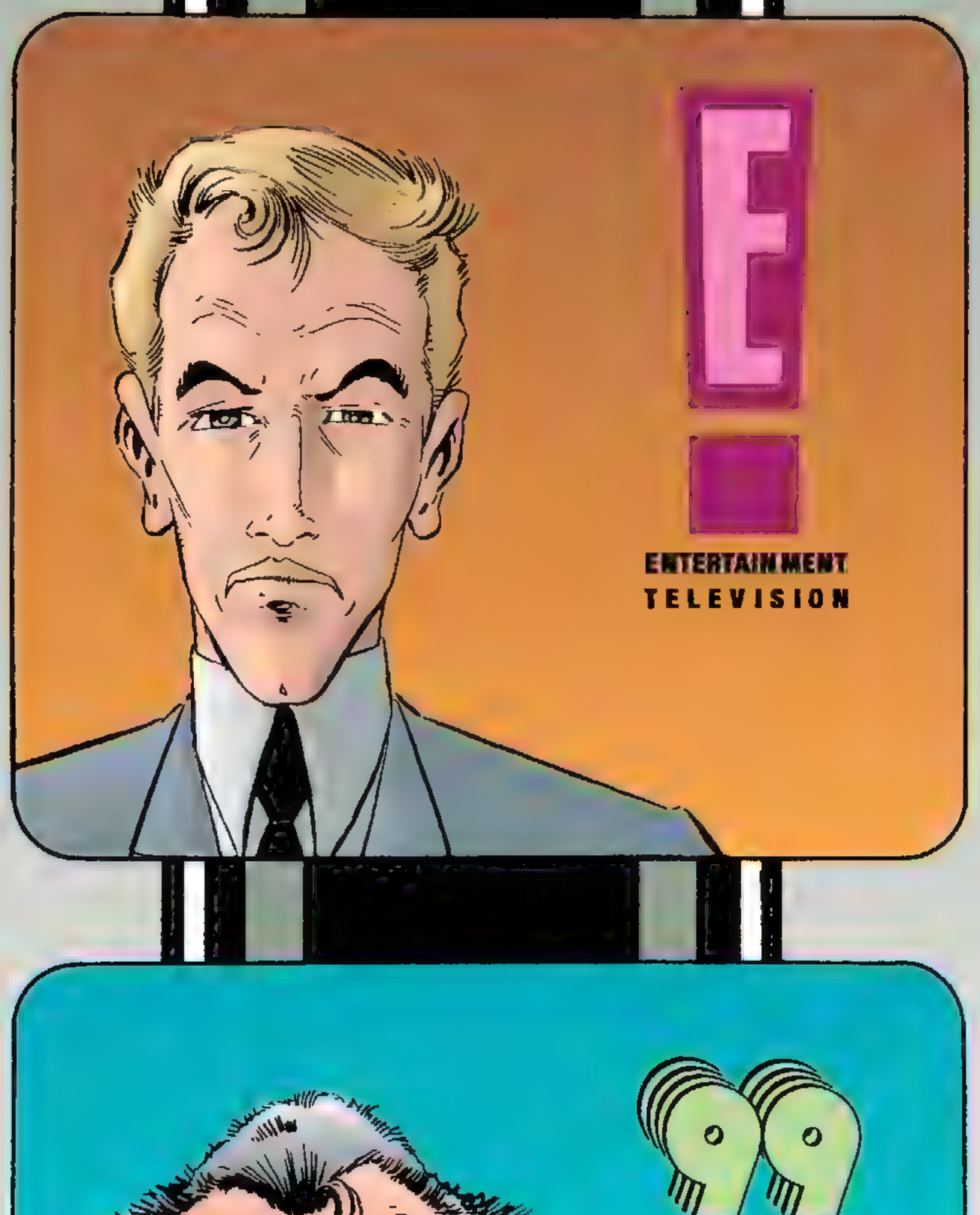
UNFORTUNATELY, IT HASN'T ALWAYS BEEN A BLISSFUL BED PARTNER.

8:0:9:2

AND IN NEW YORK, JEFF PITMAN, ATTORNEY FOR CONVICTED CHILD KILLER BILL KINCAID, WAS FINALLY SUCCESSFUL IN HIS ATTEMPTS TO MITIGATE KINCAID'S SENTENCE. THE ORIGINAL TWENTY-TWO YEAR TERM WAS REDUCED TO TEN YEARS. THAT, COMBINED WITH TIME OFF FOR GOOD BEHAVIOR AND TIME SERVED, MAKE BILL KINCAID A FREE MAN TOMORROW.

IT WAS NEARLY EIGHT YEARS AGO THAT A JOGGER IN NEW YORK CITY FOUND AMANDA JENNINGS' BODY UNDER THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE. THE EIGHT YEAR OLD GIRL WAS THE DAUGHTER OF FORMER SENATOR PAUL JENNINGS.

JENNINGS' HIGH-PROFILE EXTRA-MARITAL AFFAIR TARNISHED HIS RE-ELECTION BID A YEAR EARLIER. SOME SOURCES FELT THAT HIS MORE TRADITIONALLY-ORIENTED FORMER SUPPORTERS IN LAW ENFORCEMENT GAVE THE MATTER LESS ATTENTION THAN IT WARRANTED.



BELIEVE ME, IT WAS ***ONE*** TORRID LOVE AFFAIR. SENATOR JENNINGS AND ***MARLA FLEET*** WERE THE TALK OF THE TOWN DURING HIS RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN. VOTERS DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT BUDGETS OR TAXES. THEY WERE MORE INTERESTED IN THE ***STEAMY DETAILS*** OF HOW SENATOR JENNINGS SWEPT THE FORMER ***MISS UNIVERSE*** OFF HER FEET. MIX IN AN ***EXTREMELY*** VENGEFUL WIFE AND THE MEDIA HAD ITSELF A FEAST FOR ***MONTHS***.

THE STORY THAT MADE THE ROUNDS AT THE TIME-- THAT THE ***FORMER*** SENATOR'S ***RAGING*** HORMONES LED TO LESS OF AN INVESTIGATION OF HIS DAUGHTER'S DEATH-- IS TRULY DISTURBING. THESE WAGS IMPLY THAT WHILE JENNINGS WASN'T MUCH LOVED WHILE ***IN*** OFFICE, THE TAWDRY TRUTH BEHIND HIS DOWNFALL MAY HAVE LED TO INADEQUATE INFORMATION REACHING THE INTERESTED PARTIES.

AS A RESULT, BILLY KINCAID RECEIVED A TWENTY-TWO YEAR STRETCH INSTEAD OF THE LIFE SENTENCE WITHOUT PAROLE THAT THE PUBLIC SO DEARLY WANTED.

SURPRISE! SURPRISE!

KIDDIE KILLER KINCAID, FREE TO WALK THE STREETS OF THE BIG APPLE! WE'VE BEEN FAVORED WITH YET ***ANOTHER*** AWE-INSPIRING RULING AS THE COURTS ALLOW THIS CHILD-MURDERER HIS FREEDOM. AFTER PESTERING THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM WITH HIS ***WHINING*** AND ***APPEALS*** THESE PAST FIVE YEARS, KINCAID'S LAWYER FINALLY GOT WHAT HE WANTED-- ANOTHER ***PSYCHO*** READY TO ROAM CENTRAL PARK. OH JOY! OH RAPTURE! I FEEL SAFER ALREADY.

C'MON, FOLKS! I HATE REPEATING MYSELF BUT I'M NOT SURE ANYONE'S ***LISTENING.*** LOOKIT, THE WAY ***I*** SEE IT, KINCAID'S LAWYER DID US ***ALL*** A FAVOR. FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS, BILLY'S BEEN ***HIDDEN*** FROM US, BUT NOW WE HAVE AN OPEN ***OPPORTUNITY.*** I GUARANTEE THAT HE WAS A LOT ***SAFER*** ON THE ***INSIDE***.

MY ONLY WISH IS THAT SOMEONE BREAKS HIS BACK. ***HELLO!*** ARE YOU LISTENING, ***MR. SHADOWHAWK?***

QUEENS.

NIGHT HAS ENVELOPED A SMALL SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. AMONG THE HOMES SWALLOWED BY THE DARKNESS IS **WANDA BLAKE'S.**

SHE IS WIFE.

BUSINESS-WOMAN.

MOTHER.

IT'S THIS LAST ROLE THAT OCCUPIES HER TIME NOW.

Oh, YOU POOR LITTLE ANGEL.

FELL ASLEEP RIGHT ON TOP OF YOUR TOYS! I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU GET ALL THAT ENERGY, BUT I NEVER WANTED A DOCILE LITTLE GIRL, ANYWAY.

...THOUGH, AT TIMES, IT WOULD BE NICE.

NOW YOUR MOMMY AND DADDY CAN HAVE SOME TIME TOGETHER.

THERE YOU GO.

SHE STANDS AT HER DAUGHTER'S CRIB-SIDE FOR NEARLY TEN MINUTES, SMILING DOWN AT THE CHILD SHE THOUGHT SHE'D NEVER HAVE.

HER ONLY REGRET IS THAT HER BABY IS GROWING UP SO VERY QUICKLY. SHE PRAYS SHE WILL REMEMBER THIS TIME, THIS JOY. AS SHE LEAVES THE ROOM, WANDA WHISPERS A SMALL WISH:

"DREAM WELL TONIGHT, MY SWEETHEART."

MOORE

MILLER

I DON'T KNOW WHY MY BLOOD *BOILS* EVERY TIME I THINK OF KINCAID. YOU'D FIGURE I'D BE *OVER* THIS GUY AFTER SIX YEARS.

DETECTIVE BURKE 201

BUT I'VE GOTTA TELL YOU, TWITCH, HE DID THINGS TO THE JENNINGS GIRL THAT WERE BEYOND BELIEF... HER TEETH PULLED OUT BY PLIERS, MAGGOTS DROPPED INTO HER CUTS, AND...

...AND...

Ah, HELL. YOU'VE SEEN THE REPORT.

YES, SIR.

AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE QUITE A LARGE FAMILY.

Y' OUGHT TO COME BY THE HOUSE.

MY SEVEN CHILDREN ARE VERY PRECIOUS TO ME. WHAT KINCAID DID IS UNFORTUNATE. HOWEVER, HIS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS MUST BE UPHELD.

YEAH! YEAH!

I *KNOW*. I GET REMINDED EVERY TIME I WALK THROUGH THAT DOOR!

YOU KNOW THAT CHIEF BANKS TOOK A CHUNK OUT OF ME FOR THAT TRIP WE TOOK TO THE WINDGATE INSTITUTION THIS AFTERNOON. DOESN'T WANT ME TAKING OUT "SOME PERSONAL VENDETTA" ON THE TAXPAYER'S NICKEL. *CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT!!*

A FRIGGIN' *SENATOR'S* KID GETS SLICED INTO QUARTER-INCH *CUBES* AND WE CAN'T BE *BOTHERED* ?!!

WELL, THEN, MAY I SUGGEST, SIR, THAT WE SIMPLY KEEP A *VERY* CLOSE EYE ON MR. KINCAID, FOLLOWING HIS RELEASE.

WHAT'S A PSYCHO GOTTA DO TO GET OUR ATTENTION *ANYWAYS* ?

LIKE OUR FRIENDS IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION, I PRIDE MYSELF ON FINDING LOOPHOLES, SIR...

...SO I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'RE *FREE* AFTER WORK FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS OR SO, IF YOU'D LIKE TO JOIN ME IN MY *NEW* HOBBY...

MIDNIGHT STAKEOUTS!

JUST A COUPLE OF PALS DOING A LITTLE MALE-BONDING IN THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD, ***BY COINCIDENCE,*** AS A CERTAIN KID KILLER.

WHAT DO YOU SAY, PAL?

TWITCH, I LIKE YOUR STYLE.

THANKS, SIR.

TWO DAYS LATER...

you scream. i scream. we both screamed for ice cream.

MISTER! MISTER!

ALTHOUGH SHE WON'T NOTICE, TODAY LITTLE SHERLEE JOHNSON WILL BE GETTING SERVED BY A NEW VENDOR....

hi! that sure is a pretty dress you have...

...so pretty that you get a free popsicle. go inside the truck and get your favorite.

REALLY?

sure, sure. take all you want. get the best flavor.

GEE! THANKS!

four. five. six. seven. eight. and nine! i just love doing finger-painting!

one. two. three.

it's sad fun.

GLUE

but what's a party without a few friends?

maybe tomorrow we can go find us a little male friend.

might liven up the place.

what do ya say?

MAMA!

MAMA! MAMA!

WHAT! WHAT! WHAT! SWEETIE.

BOY, ARE YOU FULL OF ***BEANS*** TODAY. HOPE YOU WERE A ***GOOD*** GIRL FOR MRS. PALMER.

HOW WAS SHE TODAY, PAM?

SHE'S ALWAYS GOOD, WANDA.

IF I HAD MORE KIDS LIKE HER AT THIS DAYCARE IT'D SURE MAKE MY LIFE A WHOLE LOT SIMPLER.

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GIVE ME THE RECIPE TO THOSE ***HAPPY PILLS*** YOU GIVE HER.

I MISS YOU, MAMA.

YEAH, WE'RE VERY LUCKY. SHE'S BEEN SUCH A GOOD BABY FOR US. ALTHOUGH TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT, I'D HAVE TAKEN ANYTHING THAT CAME MY WAY.

WELL, YOU'VE BOTH BEEN GREAT PARENTS SO FAR. TERRY HAS BEEN JUST AN AMAZING DAD.

"DAD."

THE NAME TEARS THROUGH SPAWN'S HEART LIKE A **BULLET.** IT'S A NAME THAT HE SO DESPERATELY WANTED TO BE CALLED DURING HIS LIFE WITH WANDA.

NOW HE KNOWS THAT WILL NEVER HAPPEN. WHAT MAKES IT WORSE IS THAT HE CAN'T BLAME THE DEVIL FOR **THIS** ONE.

EVEN BEFORE HIS DEATH, HE'D BEEN CURSED.

SO, HE CONTINUES TO WATCH FROM A DISTANCE AS THE WOMAN HE LOVES-- HIS WIFE-- PLAYS GLEEFULLY WITH THE CHILD CONCEIVED BY HER CURRENT HUSBAND.

I'M GONNA GET'CHA!

Hee... MAMA... DON'T... Hee-- MAMA HAHAHA

AFTER A TIME, HE RETREATS...

...TO A PLACE WHERE HE SPENDS HIS NIGHTS, LOST AMONG LOST SOULS.

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

OH LOUIE! YOU SLAY ME!

AND THAT AIN'T THE FUNNY PART...

...WHEN JOHNNY CALLED ME THE "DESTRUCTOR OF SOCIETY," I ABOUT PEE'D MYSELF.

SO I SAYS TO HIM-- "JOHNNY, OLD SON, HOW CAN I BRING DOWN SOCIETY WHEN I CAN'T EVEN SPEAK JAPANESE OR FRENCH?!"

TONIGHT, THESE OUT-CASTS OF THE WORLD HAVE BANDED TO-GETHER FOR COMPANION-SHIP, A FEW LAUGHS, A FEW SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED STORIES.

WHEN ALL THE CHEAP WINE HAS VANISHED AND THE FIRE HAS STARTED TO DIE OUT...

...THESE TEMPORARY FRIENDS HUDDLE TO-GETHER FOR A FEW HOURS' REST...

...TRYING TO ESCAPE THE GHOSTS THAT HAUNT THEM. FOR A SHORT TIME SLEEP IS **ALMOST** A CURE.

ALMOST.

WHEE-O WHEE-O WHEE-O

CRIPES! DAMN *BUMS* BLOCKING ANOTHER ALLEY. ALWAYS SLOWING US *DOWN!*

K-KASSH KANGG

TUNGH!

GOT A ROBBERY IN PROGRESS AND I CAN HARDLY SEE WHERE I'M GOING!

SOMEONE OUGHTTA RUN THESE LOSERS OUTTA TOWN!

JEEZ!

C'MON, GEORGE, *SLOW IT DOWN!* A BIT! YOU'RE DRIVING LIKE A *LUNATIC!*

SPLASH!

SPATCK

KNICH-KT

BD

JOEY?

HEY, JOEY, C'MON MAN

STOP KIDDIN'.

JOEY!

GOD.

HOLY--! LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO HIM! THOSE DAMN COPS DIDN'T EVEN SLOW DOWN.

PLOWED RIGHT THROUGH WHERE HE WAS LYING.

I TOLD HIM NOT TO SLEEP UNDER THEM BOXES.

BUT YOU KNOW HOW JOEY WAS, YOU COULDN'T TELL HIM *NOTHIN'*!

THEM *BLOODY* COPS DON'T GIVE A *CRAP* ABOUT US! WE AIN'T EVEN WORTH BRAKING FOR BEFORE THEY *RUN US DOWN*!

THIS AIN'T GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH JOEY!

SUPPOSED T' BE PROTECTING THE LAW--

HA!

THEY BREAK THE LAW EVERY TIME NO ONE'S LOOKIN'--

AND THEY AIN'T PROTECTING ME FROM SQUAT!

THEM BUGGERS CALL IT JUSTICE-- WELL, LOOK AT *THIS*!

ork Times

B REEL

"BILLY" KINCAID FREED; MURDER CHARGE REDUCED

KINCAID! FREE!

ALREADY... IT CAN'T... damn! KEEP FORGETTING FIVE YEARS HAVE GONE BY.

RUNNING DOWN AN INNOCENT MAN TRYING TO FIND WARM FROM THE WIND... AND LETTING THIS *KINCAID* FELLOW GO, AFTER KILLING *BABIES*! THAT AIN'T JUSTICE, THAT'S NUTS!

GOOD! I WON'T LOSE OUT A SECOND TIME.

I REMEMBER JENNINGS' HIRING ME TO KILL KINCAID. SAID HE COULDN'T STAND TO SEE HIS EX-WIFE SUFFER.

EVEN THOUGH HE WASN'T WITH THE GOVERNMENT ANYMORE, HE KNEW WHAT I WAS ALL ABOUT.

A MILLION BUCKS FOR THE HIT. NO ONE WAS TO KNOW ABOUT IT-- NOTHING I COULDN'T HANDLE.

FIGURED I COULD RETIRE A BIT SOONER, FROM ALL THE GARBAGE I WAS DEALING WITH AT HEADQUARTERS.

WANDA AND I WOULD HAVE BEEN SET FOR LIFE. UNFORTUNATELY, JENNINGS STILL HAD PLENTY OF ENEMIES. INFORMATION

BY THE TIME I LOCATED KINCAID, THE COPS HAD BEAT ME TO HIM.

THE SICK PART WAS THAT KINCAID WAS SMILING MORE BROADLY THAN THE COPS.

I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THAT. WHY WOULD HE BE LAUGHING?

EVEN DURING HIS TRIAL HE HAD THAT **SICKLY** SMIRK ON HIS FACE. WHEN THE JUDGE PUT HIM AWAY, HE LAUGHED AGAIN. **WHY?**

I FOUND OUT TWO WEEKS LATER.

IN AN ABANDONED SHACK IN NORTH-WEST VIRGINIA WERE... REMAINS. MULTIPLE BODIES. ALL KIDS. ALL SO MUTILATED WE NEVER DID GET A FINAL BODY COUNT.

THAT SHACK BELONGED TO BILLY KINCAID.

WE HAD ENOUGH TO GET HIM **TEN** LIFETIME TERMS. BUT SUDDENLY THINGS STARTED DISAPPEARING. FILES. PHOTOS. CONTAINERS.

FINALLY, THE SHACK WHERE WE FOUND THE EVIDENCE BLEW UP. NOT BURNED DOWN, BUT **BLEW UP!** NOTHING WAS LEFT.

OUR PROOF OF UNTOLD DEATHS WAS GONE.

BUT THE REAL KICKER CAME LATER. MY BOSS, **JASON WYNN**, TOLD EVERYONE INVOLVED TO JUST DROP THE CASE --AND THEY DID. NO QUESTIONS ASKED.

IT WAS ONLY ONE OF THE THOUSAND REASONS WHY WYNN AND I FOUGHT. SO I PUT IT ON THE BACK BURNER. BIDING MY TIME. MEANWHILE, I HAD NOTHING TO SHOW FOR MY EFFORTS.

NO CASE. NO KILLER. NO MONEY.

JENNINGS HAD SOME VERY POWERFUL ENEMIES... PEOPLE WHO WOULD HIRE A PSYCHO TO KILL A LITTLE GIRL.

I COULD HAVE **USED** THE CASH-- MAN, THE THINGS I WANTED TO GIVE WANDA... INSTEAD, I CAVED IN... TURNED THE OTHER WAY.

I ALWAYS **SAID** I'D FIND SOME ANSWERS. NOW'S THE RIGHT TIME. I NEED A DISTRACTION FROM THIS CRAZINESS I'VE BEEN GOING THROUGH.

SOMETHING TO STOP THIS INSANITY.

SIN CITY

York Times

"BILLY" KINCAID FREED; MURDER CHARGE REDUCED

SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL MISSING

SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL MISSING

parents said she was
out playing in the
d they are in
reward

SO IT BEGINS.

A NEW PURPOSE HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE HELTER-SKELTER LIFE OF **THE SPAWN**. THIS FORMER MERCENARY HAS A BLEMISH ON HIS RECORD. HE MEANS TO CLEAN THAT UP.

IS IT A DECISION BORN OF LOGIC? A DEAD MAN'S AFFAIRS BEING PUT IN ORDER?

No.

THIS IS THE RATIONALE OF A **HIRED GUN** WHO'S **BACK FROM THE GRAVE.**

WITH ALL THAT'S WRONG IN HIS "LIFE", THE ONLY WAY TO TAKE HIS MIND OFF THINGS IS WITH WORK. FOR AN EX-**GOVERNMENT ASSASSIN,** THAT MEANS DANGER. FEAR. DEATH.

HIS ADRENALINE IS PUMPING ALREADY.

IT'S TOO BAD IT TOOK US A COUPLE NIGHTS TO TRACK KINCAID DOWN. THE BUGGER'S PROBABLY BEEN SCOUTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD ALREADY. AT LEAST WE'LL GET SWITCHED TO THE GRAVEYARD SHIFT TOMORROW.

AIN'T GONNA BE A HECK OF A LOT OF KIDS OUT AT TWO IN THE MORNING.

YES, SIR.

FOR TOMORROW, I'VE RECRUITED ONE OF MY KIDS TO WALK UP AND DOWN THE BLOCK AS A LITTLE BAIT FOR OUR GOOD FRIEND MR. KINCAID.

THE MISSUS WOULD KILL ME IF SHE KNEW.

YA KNOW, TWITCH, SOMEHOW THIS WHOLE THING ISN'T QUITE RIGHT. WE'VE GOT A KILLER LIVING FREE, OUT ON A TECHNICALITY, AND I'VE GOT TO SNEAK AROUND TRYING TO KEEP AN EYE ON HIM.

EVEN SENATOR JENNINGS ...

FORMER SENATOR, SIR...

WHATEVER!

EVEN THE *FORMER* SENATOR JENNINGS DOESN'T SEEM ALARMED BY THIS.

NO PARENTS. NO JUDGES. NO COPS.

NO ONE'S PAYING ANY ATTENTION TO THIS. I'M NOT EVEN MARRIED, LET ALONE A FRIGGIN' PARENT, AND *I* SEEM THE MOST OUTRAGED BY THIS!

... AND I CAN'T EVEN VENT MY *STUPID* MORALS.

FOR EXAMPLE, I HAVE SEVEN CHILDREN. IF ONE OF THEM TURNS OUT TO BE A CRIMINAL, AND THE OTHERS DON'T, WAS I A BAD PARENT?

I'D LIKE TO THINK THE ANSWER IS *NO.*

IT DOESN'T MEAN I'M PERFECT, BUT I COULD AT LEAST SAY I TRIED MY BEST. NO MORE. NO LESS.

THIS STAKEOUT IS OUR WAY OF DOING OUR BEST.

"BY THE BOOK." MY WHOLE CAREER'S BEEN BUILT ON THOSE THREE WORDS... YET HERE I AM HIDING IN THE SHADOWS.

SIR, ALL WE CAN DO IS LEAD BY EXAMPLE. THAT SOME PEOPLE CHOOSE TO FOLLOW BAD EXAMPLES ISN'T ANYONE'S FAULT.

"WE'RE NOT BREAKING THE LAW, SIR. WE'RE JUST GIVING IT A HELPING HAND."

i hate nights.

no sun. no kids. no fun.

tomorrow i'll go out and play, but i need to find some excitement tonight.

now let me think.

um.

um.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO HE TAKES. HE DOESN'T CARE WHOSE KID IT IS.

hee. hee. hee.

oh, billy, that's a good one.

HE'S AT IT AGAIN.

IT COULD BE ANYONES'.

um.

EVEN WANDA'S!

TINK TINK TINK

wha?!

uh, SIR, LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE A VISITOR.

A'CAPED ONE, NO LESS.

A CAPE?!

it seems someone wants to play.

perfect timing.

LET'S GO!

IT'S THAT MAFIA KILLER! WHAT THE HELL'S HE DOING *HERE*?!!

DON'T TELL ME HE *WORKS* WITH KINCAID!

come out come out wherever you are...

NO MORE.

HURRY, TWITCH! GET THE DOOR. I'LL COVER.

CRIPES! THE CHIEF'S GONNA KILL ME!

í...

í...

ice cream...

ice cream...
ice cream...

WHAT THE...!

SWEET MOTHER! WHAT'S HAPPENING *HERE?!!*

CHECK THE HOUSE! *NOW!*

A QUICK SEARCH REVEALS EVIDENCE OF ANOTHER CHILD'S DEATH.

DAMMIT! THIS IS *ALL* WRONG.

LATER, AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS...

GOT ENOUGH STUFF TO PUT KINCAID *AWAY* AGAIN. THAT PIG'LL FRY THIS TIME. NOW *ALL* WE HAVE TO DO IS *FIND* HIM.

AND THAT *CAPED* FREAK! DON'T KNOW WHAT HIS CONNECTION IS, BUT *I'M* GOING TO FIND OUT.

NOW, WE JUST HAVE TO GET THE CHIEF TO CONSENT TO LETTING US HUNT KINCAID DOWN. *CIRCUMSTANTIAL* EVIDENCE DOESN'T REALLY THRILL HIM.

WHAT IF THE CHIEF *DOESN'T* GO FOR IT...? ARE WE ON OUR OWN AGAIN, SIR?

NO! WE DO THIS BY THE *BOOK!* I ALREADY BENT THE RULES ON OUR STAKE-OUT.

I CAN'T MAKE ANY MORE EXCEPTIONS.

FORTUNATELY, SOME CAN.

BOYS SCREAMED AND GIRLS SCREAMED SO I MADE HIM SCREAM AND SCREAM AND SCREAM...

ISSUE 6

SICILY.

THE MORNING ROUTINES ARE INTERRUPTED BY AN UNSCHEDULED DEMOLITION. HOWEVER, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO THIS ITALIAN ISLAND'S BUSINESS DISTRICT. IN FACT, ALL PARTIES CONCERNED WERE GIVEN NEARLY AN HOUR'S NOTICE.

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: MESS WITH THE MAFIA AND THEY'LL MESS **YOU** UP.

SKKRMMRMMBRKKBK

THE MILITARY HAS BEEN CALLED, OF COURSE, BUT THERE'S NOTHING MUCH TO BE DONE. A MULTINATIONAL FIRM HAD REFUSED TO COOPERATE ON ALL LEVELS, SO THE CRIME CARTEL DECIDED TO DO SOME LEVELLING OF ITS OWN.

ALL THEY NEEDED WAS THEIR ONE-MAN **WRECKING CREW**...

I LOVE THIS JOB.

OVERT-KILL!

IN WHISPERED VOICES, SOME CALL HIM "**OVERKILL.**" IT HAS TO DO WITH HIS TENDENCY TO GO BEYOND THE NECESSARY MEANS.

AS HE EMERGES, WRAITH-LIKE FROM THE FLAMES AND DESTRUCTION, HIS NAME BECOMES AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

HE'S DONE HIS JOB. TIME NOW TO GO HOME.

VOOM

VOOM

VOOM

HE'S STILL COMING--

FIRE!

THE ARMY HAS DEALT WITH OVERT-KILL IN THE PAST. THAT'S WHY THEY'VE ARRIVED WITH ENOUGH FIREPOWER TO ENGAGE AN ENEMY BATTALION. TODAY'S ENGAGEMENT, THOUGH, IS ALSO A FEW SANDWICHES SHORT OF A PICNIC. **OVERT-KILL CANNOT BE DAMAGED.**

K-TING

K-TING

THE MESSAGE FINALLY SINKS IN.

NOW WHAT?!

TRY RUNNING!!

TOO SLOW.

TO THE MAFIA, THIS IS THE PERFECT EMPLOYEE. ONE THAT DOES HIS JOB WITH ENTHUSIASM.

SPAK

SPAK

SPAK

SERVICE WITH A SMILE.

WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK FROM A HIT-MAN?

SPAK!

KRUNCHKRUNCHKRUNCH

GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I GET **MAD!**

KRUNCHKRUNCHKRUNCH

HURRY! GET THE CANNON IN POSITION!

I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO PUT *THIS* INTO ACTION--

--BUT HE'S LEFT ME NO *CHOICE!*

SERGEANT ICO, THAT THING CAN WIPE OUT *TWO CITY BLOCKS!* BETTER HIT HIM THE FIRST TIME!

THE POINT BECOMES MOOT AS OVERT-KILL LEAPS HIGH INTO THE AIR AND COMES CRASHING DOWN-- DIRECTLY ON THE KP-211AF4 SPECIAL...

...A.K.A. THE SILVER GOD.

THERE ARE REASONS WHY THE MAFIA IS ABLE TO HOLD ONTO POWER.

I GOT IT. YOU WANT IT. LET'S DEAL!
sniff
FLICK FLICK FLICK
HERE'S THE SCOOP!
I MIGHT KNOW WHERE YOU CAN FIND THAT DUDE WHO'S BEEN ACEING YOUR ITALIAN BOSSES. PAPER SAYS THEY ALL HAD THEIR HEARTS MISSING! SUCKER PLAYS FOR KEEPS, 'ey?
sniff
ANYWAY, I THINK I GOT Y'R MAN: THE FREAK WEARS THIS WEIRD OUTFIT ALL THE TIME. sniff KINDA CORNY.
BUT HE'S DEFINATELY NOT ONE OF US. HE'S ALWAYS HANGING BY HISSELF. NEVER SAYS A FREAKIN' WORD! SO, I WAS THINKIN'... YOU GET ME SOMETHING I'M LOOKING FOR--
sniff
--AND TOMORROW WE CAN SWAP GOODIES!
FLICK
TEN OUNCES OF YOUR BEST POWDER BY EIGHT P.M. TOMORROW AND WE'RE IN BUSINESS.
sniff
CUT THE CRAP, FREDDY! YOU'LL GET WHAT YOU WANT. JUST TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW.
um...
sniff
YEAH, OKAY. I TRUST YOU FELLAS.
THE DUDE'S LIVING OVER...
HEY, YOU GUYS GOT A SMOKE...
FLICK FLICK
DAMN LIGHTER!
FREDDY!!
WHAT YA SAY, FELLAS?!
AND MAKE IT GOOD.
YEAH, OKAY! OKAY!
HE'S BEEN LIVING WITH THE OLD GEEZERS BACK OF 42nd AND SIXTH. HE MOVES AROUND A LOT, THOUGH.
THE BOSS WILL BE VERY, VERY HAPPY WITH YOU.
I'M SURE HE'LL SEND FLOWERS.
AAIIC

... AND SAID THAT OUR TARGET HANGS OUT SOMEWHERE IN THAT AREA AT NIGHT. WE DID A LITTLE CHECKING OF OUR OWN AT PORT AUTHORITY.

LOOKS LIKE FREDDY WAS GIVING IT TO US STRAIGHT.

STILL DON'T MAKE NO SENSE WHY THIS GUY DON'T HAVE A REGULAR HOME.

MAYBE HE'S SOME PSYCHO HOBO OUT TO GET BACK AT SOCIETY.

BOYS, IT'S OBVIOUS THERE'S MORE TO OUR MYSTERY MAN THAN MEETS THE EYE.

ANYONE WHO CAN INFLICT THE KIND OF DAMAGE ***HE*** DID SHOULDN'T BE TAKEN ***LIGHTLY.***

SO WE WON'T.

I WANT YOU TWO TO MAKE SURE THIS JOB IS DONE QUICKLY AND ***QUIETLY.*** THE OTHER DONS ARE WAITING FOR RESULTS.

MAKE SURE WE ***NEVER*** HEAR FROM THIS MAN AGAIN.

YES, BOSS.

OH...

ANOTHER THING. MAKE SURE HE SUFFERS BEFORE YOU KILL HIM.

THEN, BRING ME ***HIS*** HEART.

YO! AL, WHY YOU ALWAYS SITTING BY YOURSELF? WE *DISEASED* OR SOMETHIN'?

C'MON, MAN. WE AIN'T HERE TO GETCHA. WE'RE JUST *HERE*.

WE DON'T CARE WHAT YOU'RE RUNNIN' FROM--!

HELL, WE *ALL* GOT SECRETS. I GOT STORIES THAT'D CHILL YOUR BLOOD-- BUT IT DON'T DO NO GOOD TO KEEP REHASHING THE PAST. *SURVIVING'S* WHAT WE'RE ABOUT.

BUT IN THE MEANTIME, WE CAN GIVE EACH OTHER COMPANY. FOR MOST OF US, THAT'S ALL WE *GOT*. WE DON'T CARE WHERE YA BEEN OR HOW YA GOT THERE...

...OR EVEN WHY YOU WEAR THAT OUTFIT.

WE JUST DON'T WANT YOU TO BE AFRAID OF US.

GENTLE-MEN...

IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE TO SHARE A STORY WITH YOU...

INCREDIBLE.

EXTENDING THEIR TRUST TO AN INTRUDER. HOW BASIC THEIR LIVES HAVE BECOME. WARMTH. FOOD. COMPANION-SHIP. THEY WON'T ALLOW MY OR ANYONE'S SELF-PITY IN THEIR DOMAIN. THIS ALLEY-WAY IS THEIR CASTLE.

THE LEAST I CAN DO IS LEARN TO LIVE BY THEIR RULES.

8:0:9:2

IT'S A STORY THAT TIES DIRECTLY INTO A SMALL FAMILY DWELLING NESTLED AMONG THE CLASSIC TRAPPINGS OF SUBURBIA, U.S.A. THE LOCATION IS **QUEENS**; THE OCCUPANTS ARE QUITE TYPICAL:

A MOTHER, A FATHER AND A BABY.

WHEEEEEEEE!

THE LOVE SHARED BY THESE THREE HELPS KEEP THE FABRIC OF SOCIETY TIGHTLY WOVEN. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS JOY IS BORN OF TRAGEDY.

THAT TRAGEDY HAD A NAME: **AL SIMMONS**, A.K.A. **SPAWN**.

HIS WIDOW, **WANDA BLAKE**, HAS BELIEVED HIM TO BE DEAD FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS. BUT, WHILE SHE WAS SHATTERED BY AL'S UNTIMELY DEATH, SHE FOUND THE STRENGTH TO MOVE FORWARD. IT WAS THIS KIND OF COURAGE THAT CAUSED AL TO FALL HOPELESSLY IN LOVE WITH HER.

A WHOLE LOT OF THAT LOVE COMES FROM **CYAN**, HER BABY DAUGHTER-- THOUGH AT FIFTEEN MONTHS SHE IS HARDLY AN INFANT ANY LONGER.

RUNNING! SCREAMING! BANGING! LONG PERIODS OF SILENCE ARE A THING OF THE PAST...

OH OH!

... AND HER NEW HUSBAND.

NOT ONLY IS **TERRY FITZGERALD** A GOOD FATHER AND CARING SPOUSE, BUT HE WAS THE BEST FRIEND OF AL SIMMONS. IF ANYONE COULD TAKE CARE OF WANDA BETTER THAN AL, IT WOULD BE TERRY.

THIS MAKES THE SITUATION EVEN MORE TRAGIC. SHOULD AL INTRUDE, OR LEAVE WANDA TO LIVE HER NEW LIFE IN PEACE?

HERE WE GO!

WHEEEEE!

READY ?

NOW SHE IS REMARRIED, AND **LOVE** IS ONCE AGAIN PART OF HER LIFE.

... AND WANDA WOULDN'T TRADE IT FOR ANYTHING. THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL, A CHILD, HAS FINALLY BEEN GIVEN TO HER...

NEITHER CHOICE WILL BRING HAPPINESS TO **ALL** INVOLVED. UNTIL OUR HERO REACHES A DECISION, HE'LL BE **HAUNTED** BY THIS "NO-WIN" SITUATION THAT'S SLOWLY TEARING HIM APART.

IN A GHETTO OF DISPLACED HUMANITY, BEHIND PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL...

THIS IS GOING GREAT. WE'VE LEFT A TRAIL EVEN A *BLIND MAN* COULD FOLLOW.

DON'T KNOW *WHY* THIS HERO'S SO ATTACHED TO THESE BUMS *ANY-WAYS*. GUESS HE LIKES HANGING AROUND *CRAP*, Y'KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

EXCUSE ME, LOSER. MAY I HAVE A *WORD* WITH YOU?

wha... ?

OH! A *SMART-ASS*, HUH?!

SPAT!

Hee hee hee hee

THIS IS A *RIOT!* A COUPLE MORE AND I GUESS WE CAN SIT BACK AND WAIT FOR THE CAPED DUDE TO SHOW.

HOW MANY IS THIS NOW? FOUR?

FIVE.

BUT WHO'S COUNTING?

I'M GLAD YOU CAN LAUGH AT THIS, TOMMY. I LEARNED A LONG TIME AGO THAT YOU CAN'T TAKE *ANY* OF THIS PERSONALLY.

Y'KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

YUP.

'CAUSE WHO WANTS TO TAKE THEIR WORK WITH THEM. I'D RATHER WATCH FOOTBALL.

SUCK DOWN A FEW BEERS. RELAX. Y'KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

YUP.

SO WE'LL JUST TAKE CARE OF THIS HIT TONIGHT, REPORT BACK TO THE BOSS ON A JOB WELL DONE, THEN GO FIND US A COUPLE OF BROADS.

YOU UP FOR IT?

YUP.

UH?! GEURRK ...

YOUR FRIEND IS **DEAD!** IT'S JUST YOU AND **ME**, COWARD. NOW I WANT TO KNOW WHO'S AFTER ME...

...AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, **WHY?!**

Y'KNOW WHAT I MEAN?

The New York Times

ALLEY LITTERED WITH BODIES

TWO KNOWN FELONS AMONG THE CORPSES

SO WE AGREE THAT MORE DRASTIC MEASURES ARE APPROPRIATE.

GOOD.

YOU'VE ALL HEARD OF THE AGENT I'M REFERRING TO. ***BARTINO*** SAID THAT HE'S AVAILABLE FOR THIS SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT--BOTH AS A FAVOR TO US, AND FOR A TWO PERCENT CUT OF NEXT WEEK'S TAKE.

A FAIR PRICE.

NOW, LET US VOTE. DO WE CONTINUE LETTING SOME BACK-ALLEY HERO KEEP KILLING US, OR DO WE ***DISPOSE*** OF THE PARASITE?

WHACK 'IM.

WHACK HIM.

WHACK HIM.

DISPOSE OF HIM.

HEE. HEE. WHACK HIM!

KILL HIM.

WHACK HIM, SIR.

LET HIM LIVE, I SAY!

-- JUST KIDDING. SLAUGHTER HIM!

VERY FUNNY, TONY.

THEN IT'S UNANYMOUS.

VERY GOOD.

THEN I'M SURE YOU WON'T MIND WHEN I TELL YOU I'VE ALREADY TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF HAVING OVERT-KILL ARRIVE A FEW DAYS EARLY.

HE SEEMED TO BE QUITE ENTHUSED ABOUT HELPING US DEAL WITH OUR PROBLEM. GINO TOLD ME THAT OVERT-KILL THINKS IT'S A ***YOUNG-BLOOD*** HE'S AFTER. HE HAD A RUN-IN WITH THEM A FEW YEARS BACK, AND HASN'T FORGOTTEN HOW THEY EMBARRASSED HIM.

NO SENSE ANY OF US TELLING HIM OTHERWISE.

BESIDES, HE SHOULD BE ON HIS WAY UP ANYWAY.

ha.

BOOM BOOM BOOM

"ON HIS WAY UP." WHAT A SENSE OF HUMOR THE BOSS HAS.

I KNOW WHATCHA MEAN. I HEARD THE GUY'S AS BIG AS A HOUSE.

HE WOULDN'T EVEN FIT THROUGH THE DOOR.

HA-HA.

KRINKLE

KRUNCH

GENTLEMEN, MAY I PRESENT THE SOLUTION TO OUR PROBLEMS.

HI.

WORD QUICKLY SPREADS THAT THE MOB REQUESTS A MEETING WITH THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF ITS SEVEN LEADERS.

ADDED TO THAT REQUEST IS THE BROKEN BODY OF ANOTHER HOMELESS VICTIM. SPAWN HAD NEVER MET THIS VAGRANT, AND IS NOT HAPPY THAT ALL THE STREET PEOPLE ARE UNDER THREAT BY IMPLIED ASSOCIATION.

HE INTENDS TO CORRECT THIS SITUATION **IMMEDIATELY.**

SCUMBAG.

ALWAYS PREYING ON THE WEAK.

LET'S SEE HOW YOU DEAL WITH **DEATH WARMED OVER.**

THOUGH HE KNOWS HE'S NO ACTOR, AL REALIZES HIS COSTUME LENDS AN ELEMENT OF FEARSOME-NESS. IT'S NOT MUCH, BUT HE'LL TAKE IT.

SHOW YOUR-SELF... IF YOU DARE.

HA!

GOOD ONE, AMERICAN'!

KRAK

I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU ***WEREN'T*** AFRAID TO FACE ME!

THAT'S ADMIRABLE.

AND A LITTLE *IDIOTIC!*

DON'T PUFF YOURSELF UP ON **MY** ACCOUNT! I'M HERE BECAUSE OTHERWISE YOU'LL JUST CONTINUE TO BEAT BAG LADIES TO A PULP.

WHAT A HERO!

YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH ME? THEN **HERE** I AM!

...THOUGH FOR THE LIFE OF ME, I DON'T KNOW **WHAT** I'VE DONE.

I CAN SEE BY YOUR DEMEANOR THAT YOU'RE TOO **STUPID** TO CARE ABOUT THAT!

WITH THE NAME-CALLING OUT OF THE WAY, THE TWO GLADIATORS QUICKLY SIZE EACH OTHER UP.

AND SINCE SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE, EMOTION LEADS THE CHARGE.

DON'T CALL ME *STUPID* *!!*

SHOVE IT, YOU FREAK!

I THINK HE'S *MAD!*

I'M NOT SOME **DRUNK HOBO** THAT YOU CAN STEAMROLL. OR ARE YOU **AFRAID** OF SOMEONE WHO CAN FIGHT BACK?!

I WAS GOING TO KILL YOU QUICKLY, BUT NOW I SEE THERE'S NO POINT IN HURRYING.

CRASH

OOOH!

MAGIC CHAINS! HELP ME, I'M DYING! I CAN'T BREATHE!!

HA HA HA HA HA HA

GET REAL!

CRASH

DON'T KNOW WHY MY CHAINS DID THAT. I DIDN'T TRY TO USE ANY POWER.

I'LL FIGURE IT OUT LATER. RIGHT NOW I'VE GOT MY HANDS FULL.

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

NOW YOU SIT STILL LIKE A GOOD LITTLE BOY WHILE I RIP YOUR HEAD OFF.

HEY!

QUIT YER SQUIRMING, I SAID...

GRABBED TOO MUCH CAPE... I'VE GOT ONLY A FEW SECONDS...

BETTER MAKE THEM COUNT.

NOW I'M PISSED.

GOTTA DUCK... NOW!

uh?

KRUNCH!

GNRRK

RRRN

CREAK

NCH

CREAK

CREAK

KUK-

DO NOT LOOK SO CONFIDENT, MY FRIEND.

SUCH SMUGNESS HAS BEEN THE *DOWNFALL* OF MEN GREATER THAN *YOU*.

THIS *MINOR* SETBACK WILL ONLY MAKE THE BATTLE MORE *CHALLEN-GING!*

POP!

A CYBORG!

I FOUGHT THEM YEARS AGO, BEFORE I WAS KILLED. BUT THEY WEREN'T NEARLY AS ADVANCED.

NOR AS **DEADLY.**

SAVE IT FOR SOME-ONE WHO CARES.

YOU ARE TOO SLOW, MY FRIEND!

SWAK

YOUR GOVERNMENT MUST TRULY BE DESPERATE, TO HAVE MADE YOU ONE OF THEIR *YOUNGBLOOD!*

WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

COME ON! GET UP!

I HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE OF YOU HAVING THE POWER TO RIP MEN'S *HEARTS* OUT! *SHOW ME YOUR SKILLS!*

MAKE MY TRIP TO AMERICA *WORTH* IT!

GLAK

COME ON! FIGHT!

NO.

I SAID...

FIGHT!!

NO.

DO YOU HEAR ME?

FIGHT!

SHOW ME YOUR POWER! SHOW ME YOUR STRENGTH!!

SINCE YOU WON'T FIGHT FOR YOUR COUNTRY, YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ELSE...

LET'S SEE WHAT KIND OF HEROES THE *U.S.* MAKES!

BAH!

DIE!

DEAD!

AND I DIDN'T EVEN BREAK A SWEAT! 'COURSE, COME TO THINK OF IT, I *CAN'T* SWEAT!

HAW-HAW.

WHAT A FRIGGIN' WASTE OF TIME. THE GUY COULD JUST HAVE BEEN SHOT BY ONE OF THE LOCAL WISE-GUYS, INSTEAD OF MAKING ME LEAVE MY ASSIGNMENT IN SICILY. STUFF LIKE THIS JUST *PISSES* ME OFF.

I DON'T *NEED* NO EASY KILLS.

DEAD? WHAT'S HE BABBLING ABOUT? HE HAD ME COLD, AND DIDN'T PUT ME AWAY?!

HE MUST HAVE DAMAGED HIS **EXTERNAL LIFE SENSORS** WHEN HIS **ARM** SHATTERED. MY **HEARTBEAT** PROBABLY WASN'T REGISTERING. HE REALLY **COULD** HAVE KILLED ME! - GUESS I GOT A LUCKY BREAK.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, **MY** RIGHT ARM IS BROKEN. I DIDN'T WANT TO USE ANY POWER WITH THIS ONE 'TIL I FIGURED OUT WHERE I STOOD. BILL KINCAID WAS NO PROBLEM. **THIS** GUY IS SOMETHING ELSE.

NOW I'VE GOT TO DRAIN MORE POWER.

DAMN.

LATER THAT NIGHT, SPAWN TRAVELS AN ARMY BASE. HIS LIFE SPENT AS A MERCENARY, DIDN'T END WITH ANY SHORT-AGE OF WELL-KEPT SECRETS.

HOPE THEY'RE STILL STORED HERE.

IT'S TIME I STOPPED RUNNING AROUND WITH MY TAIL BETWEEN MY LEGS...

...AND STARTED USING THE SKILLS I ALREADY HAVE. NO NEED TO WASTE MY POWERS, DIDN'T HAVE THEM BE-FORE, NO SENSE USING THEM AS A CRUTCH NOW.

AIN'T **NO ONE** GOING TO FORCE ME TO USE MY POWERS AGAIN.

ESPECIALLY NOT SOME **BLOODY** CYBORG HALF-BREED!

GETTING **TIRED** OF BEING PUSHED AROUND.

CHAK CLICK SNAP

I'M BETTER THAN THAT!

U.S. ARMY

ISSUE 7

THREE WEEKS AGO, AL SIMMONS RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE. TRICKED-- DECEIVED-- HE NOW LIVES A LIFE HE'D MUCH RATHER NEVER HAVE STARTED. WITH HUNDREDS OF QUESTIONS STILL TO BE ANSWERED, THE ONE THING HE HASN'T BEEN IS **COMFORTABLE.**

HIS NEW LIFE AND POWERS ARE A MOCKERY. BOTH ARE CRUEL JOKES, PUT INTO PLAY BY A LEGENDARY **EVIL.** TO USE THOSE POWERS MEANS STEPPING CLOSER TO A **SECOND DEATH.** HOLDING BACK WILL BUY HIM THE TIME TO ASK ALL HIS QUESTIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FATES AREN'T COOPERATING.

PUSHED INTO BATTLE AGAINST A MAFIA-DIRECTED **CYBORG,** THE SPAWN AVOIDED USE OF HIS POWER DURING BATTLE. HOWEVER, TWO CRACKED RIBS AND A BROKEN ARM CHANGED THAT. HE CAN ENDURE THE PAIN FROM THE RIBS, BUT THE ARM **HAD** TO BE FIXED.

MORE WASTED ENERGY.

THERE HAD TO BE A WAY TO STOP IT. **THERE WAS!** WHILE A GOVERNMENT-PAID ASSASSIN, HE WAS ONE IN A HANDFUL PRIVY TO CERTAIN DETAILS ... SUCH AS THE LOCATION OF THE RIGHT HARDWARE TO DROP A CYBORG.

WITH THE LAST SNAP OF A MAGAZINE CLIP FOR AN AK-830 ROCKET LAUNCHER, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THREE WEEKS, FEELS THE WAY HE **USED TO** WHEN HE WAS STALKING A KILL:

...COMFORTABLE.

U.S. ARMY

VERY, **VERY** COMFORTABLE.

AND SOMEWHERE IN HELL, A CHILDLIKE GRIN CROSSES THE FACE OF EVIL.

THIS SHOULD JUST ABOUT DO IT.

GOT ENOUGH FIREPOWER TO LEVEL A SMALL BUILDING... OR A BIG CYBORG.

LUCKY FOR ME, HIS EXTERNAL LIFE SENSORS WENT HAYWIRE WHEN HIS ARM WAS DAMAGED. HE THOUGHT I WAS DEAD. DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH MORE I COULD HAVE TAKEN.

THOUGH IF PUSH CAME TO SHOVE, I COULD HAVE BLOWN THE CRAP OUTTA HIM WITH MY POWERS.

NOT NOW!

BUMP!

ANOTHER INTRUSION. ANOTHER DISTRACTION. YOUR PRESENCE HAS BEEN DETECTED SOONER THAN YOU THOUGHT.

BUMP! BUMP!

THIS IS THE ARMY, AFTER ALL. THE COUNTRY'S ELITE. YOU WERE ONE OF THEM NOT LONG AGO.

GET THE DOOR, RAM!

THE CROW-BAR WEDGED IN THE DOOR WON'T KEEP THEM BACK FOR LONG.

SKAK!

THIS'LL GET THE JOB DONE! C'MON, GUYS! I CAN FEEL IT GIVING!

JOHNSON, WHAT THE HELL'S TAKING OUR BACK-UPS SO LONG?!

I TOLD THEM IT WAS PRIORITY CODE ONE!

THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY, SIR.

WITH EACH CRUSHING BLOW, THE STEEL RE-ENFORCED DOORS OFFER LESS RESISTANCE.

AS HINGES BUCKLE, THE SPAWN WEIGHS HIS OPTIONS.

PROBABLY JUST A BUNCH OF KIDS...

HE IS AFFORDED NEITHER LUXURY.

SKAK!

DAMMIT.

HE CURSES... **NOT** BECAUSE HE COULDN'T TAKE ON THESE YOUNG ARMY BRATS--AND **WIN!**--BUT BECAUSE HE DOESN'T EVEN **WANT** TO FIGHT.

FREEZE! DON'T MAKE A MOVE!

THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN A CONCEPT **FOREIGN** TO HIM DURING HIS PREVIOUS LIFE.

...SO **KILLING** 'EM WON'T SOLVE ANYTHING. WHAT I NEEDED MOST WAS **TIME**. THAT, AND A LITTLE BIT OF **LUCK**.

THOUGH HE'S PRIMED FOR ACTION, THIS IS NOT THE ACTION HE'S LOOKING FOR. HIS SIGHTS ARE SET ON A **SPECIFIC** TARGET. UNFORTUNATELY, GETTING TO THAT TARGET INVOLVES ANOTHER DRAIN ON HIS POWERS.

TELEPORTATION. HE HASN'T TRIED IT YET. HE HOPES IT WORKS.

IT DOES, SORT OF.

HIS MOLECULES ARE RIPPED APART, ONE BY ONE, THEN MESHED TOGETHER WITH THE EXISTING MOLECULAR STRUCTURES PRESENT. THEY ARE THEN **VACUUMED**--SUCKED AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT--TO A PRE-ORDAINED LOCATION...

...THEN, REASSEMBLED AS FIERCELY AS THEY WERE SEPARATED.

PUT SIMPLY--THE SPAWN ISN'T HAVING FUN YET.

HOLY MOTHER!!

I THINK I'M GOING TO PUKE.

HE MELTS TO THE GROUND OF A DESERTED ALLEYWAY IN THE BOWERY, AN AREA THAT SOMEHOW DRAWS HIM BACK SINCE HIS RETURN TO EARTH.

THIS IS HIS NEW HOME. FULL OF GARBAGE AND CRAP AND DRUNKS, IT SERVES A PURPOSE: THAT OF A **CONSTANT.**

BESIDES, HE'S BEGINNING TO **BOND** WITH SOME OF HIS 'NEIGHBORS.'

HGKKHLKP

AS HE THRASHES, CRUMPLED ON THE CRACKED PAVEMENT, AN ADVANTAGE OF THIS ARRANGEMENT BECOMES APPARENT.

YO! RED MAN!

NEVER FEAR! **BOBBY'S** HERE!

YOU AIN'T ***LOOKIN'*** SO SOLID. I SAY TO MYSELF, IT'S TIME FOR GOOD OL' **UNCLE BOBBY** TO WEAVE SOME OF HIS STREET MAGIC.

hic

oops!

8:03:1

C'MON, BOY! A BIG STRAPPIN' FELLA LIKE YOU OUGHTTA HAVE MORE STAMINA THAN *THAT*. WHY, WHEN *I* WAS YOUR AGE I COULD POUND BACK A WHOLE *CASE* OF SUDS AND NEVER BURP EVEN *ONCE!*

--THOUGH MY FARTS WERE PRETTY WICKED...

I'M NOT DRUNK. I JUST NEED A MINUTE TO--

SURE! SURE! LOOKIT, KID, IT AIN'T *NOTHIN'* TO BE ASHAMED OF.

SOME OF US WAS JUST BUILT WITH STRONG *STOMACHS* AND BIGGER *BLADDERS!*

NOW YOU JUST SIT BACK AND *RELAX*. I'M GONNA WATCH OUT FOR YOU TONIGHT.

hic

oops!

YEAH, OKAY... FINE.

THIS IS WHY SPAWN CAME BACK. BECAUSE HE CAN BE WITH THOSE WHO CARE.

AS IMPROBABLE AS IT SEEMS, THE BUMS OF A CERTAIN FOUR BLOCK RADIUS HAVE ACCEPTED THE SPAWN AS ONE OF THEIR OWN.

LET ME ASK YOU A *QUESTION*, BOY.

WHY YOU *ALWAYS* PARADIN' AROUND IN THAT QUEER LOOKIN' *OUTFIT*? YOU DECIDE TO HEAD TO THE STREETS ON HALLOWE'EN, OR *WHAT?*

I MEAN, HOW'RE YA EXPECTING T' FEEL *ALIVE* WHEN YOU'RE WEARING SOMETHIN' THAT DON'T ALLOW BOTTLED *HAPPI-NESS* TO REACH YOUR LIPS?

HERE! GIMME THAT!

SPAWN SITS FROZEN WITH THE MOMENT.

WHAT CAN HE SAY NOW?

HEE HEE HAR!

CRIPES, KID, YOU'RE EVEN *UGLIER* THAN MY AUNT MABEL--AND SHE *WAS* UGLY!!!

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT THESE CASTAWAYS GAVE UP ON JUDGING THE SURFACE OF THINGS LONG AGO.

NO!

C'MON, BUD, I WAS ONLY KIDDING.

IN ANOTHER PART OF NEW YORK, IN THE BUILDING OWNED BY MAFIA DON VITO GRAVANO, NERVES ARE LESS FRAYED.

WE ARE ALL GRATEFUL FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE, OVERT-KILL. BARTINO IS VERY LUCKY TO HAVE YOU IN HIS RANKS.

THE DAMAGE YOU SUSTAINED IS UNFORTUNATE, BUT WE WILL GLADLY COVER THE COST OF ANY REPAIRS NECESSARY. YOU MAY ALSO HAVE MY PRIVATE JET AT YOUR DISPOSAL, WHENEVER YOU WISH TO LEAVE FOR YOUR HOMELAND.

I WILL LEAVE WHEN I AM 100% AGAIN. NOT BEFORE.

...THOUGH MY TARGET WAS FAR TOO EASY A KILL--

MISTER BARTINO WILL NOT UNDER-STAND MY ACCIDENT ...

-- IT WOULD NOT DO MY REPUTATION ANY GOOD TO GO HOME LESS THAN PERFECT. I HOPE YOU UNDER-STAND?

I DO.

TOO BAD BARTINO DIDN'T HAVE THE SAME COMPASSION. IF YOU DON'T MIND MY ASKING... WHO WILL YOU WORK FOR WHEN BARTINO DIES-- HOPEFULLY NOT FOR MANY YEARS -- BUT SUCH QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ASKED.

AND SO IT GOES GRAVANO TRIES TO SWALLOW UP MORE POWER. HIS NICKNAME ON THE STREET IS "DRACULA," BECAUSE HE LIVES TO SUCK THE POWER OUT OF EVERYONE.

NOOOOO!

EXPLODING **PAIN** ENGULFS SPAWN'S SENSES, REBOUNDING IN HIS SKULL, LIKE A SATANIC PINBALL GAME. THEN, **ANOTHER** FLASHBACK SLASHES ITS WAY TO THE SURFACE.

IT'S A PIECE OF FORGOTTEN **PAST** TRYING TO TIE TOGETHER THE FINAL CLUES ABOUT HIS **DEATH**.

HE WAS A SOLDIER, A PATRIOT. HE DID WHAT HIS COUNTRY ASKED AND WAS DECORATED FOR IT. AS A COVERT HIT-MAN, HIS SELECTIVE CONSCIENCE WAS AN ASSET. IT WAS MARRIAGE... THOUGHTS OF FAMILY AND FUTURE... THAT SPROUTED THE SEEDS OF HIS **DOOM**.

INCREASINGLY, HIS LIFE WAS FILLED WITH **DOUBT**. THE PERFECT KILLER STARTED ASKING QUESTIONS.

HE FELL OUT OF FAVOR, AND WAS **MURDERED**.

HIS LIFE BECAME A **NIGHTMARE**.

WHY CAN'T HE RECALL HIS KILLER'S **FACE**?

WHY IS HE HAUNTED... **HOUNDED**... BY THIS VISION OF THE **GRIM REAPER**?

THEN... OUR TRAGIC HERO IS GIVEN A **CLUE**.

BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?!

SCUM LIKE YOU MAKE ME SICK!

EVEN IF THEY HADN'T PAID ME FOR THIS--

--I'D HAVE KILLED YOU FOR FREE!!!

THERE ISN'T ANY ROOM FOR TRAITORS, SIMMONS!!! WE'RE AT WAR!! NO TIME FOR MORONS OR YOUR SELF-RIGHTEOUS GRAND-STANDING! I'M GLAD THEY FINALLY DECIDED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

THEY WERE SMART ENOUGH TO GET THE BEST MAN FOR THE JOB. ONE WHO CAN STILL FOLLOW ORDERS!

I'LL SEE YA IN HELL, BRO'.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN!!

STOPP!

HEY, BUD!

I SAID I WAS ONLY KIDDING ABOUT YOUR LOOKS!

PEACEFULNESS.

IT CAN BE SUCH A RARE COMMODITY--

STOP!

DON'T KILL HIM!!

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE HER HUSBAND'S DEATH. **WANDA BLAKE** HAD COME TO TERMS WITH THAT FACT YEARS AGO, BUT IN THE PAST THREE WEEKS, HER SLEEP HAS BEEN SPORATIC AT BEST. SHE CAN'T STOP THINKING OF HIM AND HIS TORTURED SOUL. AND, TRY AS SHE MIGHT TO HIDE IT FROM HER **NEW** HUSBAND, THESE ARE IMAGES SHE **CANNOT** ENDURE.

WANDA! WANDA!

WHAT IS IT?!

SNAP **OUT** OF IT, SWEET-HEART!

THERE'S NOTHING **HERE!**

don't kill... him...

i...

uh?

...oh TERRY, WHAT'S **WRONG** WITH ME? SOMEONE KILLED HIM! **SOMEONE SHOT AL!! I DON'T THINK** HE WAS KILLED IN ACTION--! I-- I... HE COULDN'T...

LISTEN, BABY, YOU'VE GOT TO LET IT **GO.** AL'S **DEAD.** HE DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY. BUT HE **WASN'T MURDERED.** YOU'VE SAID SO IN THE PAST.

LOOK. TOMORROW, I'LL SEND FOR HIS FILES AND CHECK AGAIN.

THAT'S NOT **ENOUGH.**

YOU SEE, MY VERY EXISTENCE IS PUTTING ALL OF YOU IN **DANGER**. **SOMEONE** WANTS ME, AND THEY'RE WILLING TO CARVE A PATH THROUGH THESE ALLEYWAYS TO **ELIMINATE** ME. FOR **NOW**, THEY THINK I'M DEAD...

...THE PERFECT TIME TO GO ON THE OFFENSIVE. BESIDES, **SOMEBODY** HAS TO PROTECT OUR TERRITORY. THIS IS OUR **HOME**, BOBBY.

WE CAN'T LET THEM TAKE ANY **MORE**.

I CAN'T.

JEEZ!

LIGHTEN ***UP***, AL! WE DON'T GOTTA WORRY ABOUT 'EM... WE CAN JUST ***MOVE***. WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME...!

SO ***PISS*** ON' EM, ***I*** SAY! LET 'EM ***HAVE*** THE STINKIN' GARBAGE! IT AIN'T WORTH FIGHTING FOR.

NO. BUT **YOU** ARE.

BESIDES, FRIEND, **I** WON'T MOVE. THESE ALLEYS ARE **OURS**... NOW, TOMORROW, AND NEXT WEEK. THEY HAVE NO **RIGHT**. AND THEY HAVE NO **GUTS**.

THIS'LL BE **EASY**. I PROMISE.

HAHA!

SO YOU'RE A REGULAR ***HERO***, ARE YOU?

AND HERE I FIGURED YOU WORE THAT GETUP 'CAUSE YOU WERE SOME KIND'A FRUITCAKE...!

I'M NO HERO.

SUIT YOURSELF. AIN'T NO BUSINESS OF MINE *ANY*WAYS.

BUT TELL ME, SON. FROM WHAT *I'VE* HEARD, IT'S THE DAMN *MAFIA* THAT'S BEEN COMBING OUR TURF. YOU AIN'T CRAZY ENOUGH TO TRY AND TAKE *THEM* DUDES ON, ARE YOU?

HOW YOU FIGURIN' ON PULLIN' OFF SOMETHIN' *STUPID* LIKE *THAT*?

I HAVE MY WAYS.

YEAH, I CAN SEE!!

WHA'CHA PLANNING ON DOING? CONQUERING CHINA?

NO.

IT'S WHAT IT'LL TAKE TO EVEN A SCORE.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE.

TIME TO STREAMLINE.

HIS CAPE WILL ONLY GET IN THE WAY NOW. OTHER THAN FOR SHOW, HE SEES NO REASON TO KEEP IT.

*AS SPAWN WALKS AWAY, LOST IN THE CLATTERING OF GUNS AND AMMO, NEITHER HE NOR BOBBY NOTICE THE CAPE AS IT SLITHERS **AFTER** THEM...!*

THE NEXT MORNING, AT THE ANIMAL SHELTER NEAR WANDA'S HOME...

YOU HEARD ME **RIGHT**, MA'AM.. DON'T HAVE **ANY-** ONE HERE ON STAFF WHO FITS YOUR DESCRIPTION.

SOUNDS LIKE A MIGHTY FINE FELLA, THOUGH.

...EXCEPT, OF COURSE, ABOUT HIM POSING AS AN S.P.C.A. **EMPLOYEE**. I CAN'T APPROVE **THAT** PART.

MIGHT HAVE BEEN FROM **ANOTHER** DISTRICT... THOUGH THAT DON'T EXPLAIN WHY HE'D KNOW ABOUT **YOUR** DOG.

SHE BRUSHED IT OFF AT THE TIME, BUT WANDA HASN'T BEEN ABLE TO STOP THINKING ABOUT THE MAN WHO CAME CALLING ABOUT HER DOG*...

BESIDES, THERE HAVE BEEN THOSE RECURRING DREAMS ABOUT AL...

IN SOME WEIRD WAY, SHE FEELS HE MIGHT HAVE **KNOWN** AL...

HE SEEMED LIKE SUCH A TROUBLED INDIVIDUAL. IF NOTHING ELSE, SHE WANTED TO MAKE SURE HE WAS OKAY.

NOW SHE KNOWS THE NICE GENTLEMAN WAS A FRAUD. BUT **WHY?** MAYBE HE WAS CHECKING UP ON HER HUSBAND? MARRIAGE TO A C.I.A. MAN DOES HAVE ITS PITFALLS.

*SPAWN #3. -- Tom -

GO AHEAD! GET A GOOD LOOK! BUT I'LL **TELL** YA, I'M MIGHTY **PROUD** OF MY EARS!

SURE, I'VE HEARD ALL THE JOKES. "YOU LOOK LIKE A **TAXI** WITH ITS **DOORS** OPEN!" "HEY, **DUMBO!**" "HEY, **TROPHY**-HEAD!" IF NOTHING **ELSE**, THEY SURE DO BREAK THE *ICE!*

wha ...?!

Um... oh, PARDON ME, I WAS THINKING OF SOMETHING. **WHAT** DID YOU...?

AFTER TEN MINUTES TALKING ABOUT EARLOBES AND ROSS PEROT, WANDA EXCUSES HERSELF.

I WONDER IF TERRY'S IN SOME SORT OF TROUBLE AT HIS JOB.

WAS THAT GUY A GOVERNMENT STIFF... OR SOMETHING **MORE**...?

THESE QUESTIONS WILL FOLLOW HER FOR THE WHOLE DAY.

NIGHTFALL.

THE PERFECT TIME FOR DEAD HEROES TO GO TO WORK.

TIME TO GET SOME FAST ANSWERS. THAT THUG I TOOK OUT LAST NIGHT **KILLED** HIMSELF BEFORE I COULD GET ANY ANSWERS.

BET IT WON'T TAKE ME LONG BEFORE I GET SOME **NEW** ONES.

HE'S RIGHT. IT TAKES ONLY THREE WELL-PLACED APPEARANCS TO GET TO THE FACTS: WHO SENT **OVERT-KILL?**

A MAN NICKNAMED **DRACULA.**

NOW TO PAY HIM A LITTLE **VISIT.**

IN A MIDTOWN BUILDING, PERCHED AMID THE CONCRETE CATASTROPHES OF NEW YORK CITY, SITS A SOMBER FIGURE.

HE CONSIDERS HIS OPTIONS: WHICH COMPANIES TO ENGULF; WHAT TO WEAR TO THE CHARITY FUNDRAISER; WHOSE WIFE TO SEDUCE...

THESE PLANS ARE MADE WITH NO FEAR OF INTERRUPTION. **NO ONE** HAS EVER PENETRATED PAST THE SECOND LEVEL OF THE RESIDENT TWELVE TIER SECURITY SYSTEM.

NO ONE.

I NEED YOUR HELP, FAT BOY.

BRATATAT

THOUGH THIS ENCOUNTER WON'T SOLVE ANY OF SPAWN'S PROBLEMS, IT **WILL** SATISFY ONE DEEP NEED:

BATTLE.

SOMETIMES THERE DOESN'T EVEN NEED TO BE A REASON, THOUGH, THIS TIME, HE HAS ONE... A DEBT TO THE RESIDENTS OF THE ALLEYWAYS.

THEN AGAIN, MAYBE IT'S FOR HIMSELF ALONE. A PURPOSE. A WAY TO RESUME HIS LIFE.

A REASON FOR **HOPE.**

COCKY SONOVABITCH.

HEY **HERO!**

SEEMS I SCREWED ***UP!!*** SHOULD HAVE RIPPED YOUR FRIGGIN' ***HEAD*** OFF TO MAKE ***SURE*** YOU WAS DEAD!

I INTEND TO ***CORRECT*** MY OVERSIGHT. THANKS FOR THE INVITE.

SHALL WE ***PLAY?***

GLADLY.

KCHK

SPAWN'S LEAP TO SAFETY GOES **NOWHERE** AS OVERT-KILL'S HAND DARTS OUT!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR MAGIC CHAINS *NOW*?!

HE'D FORGOTTEN ABOUT HIS LOOSE-HANGING CHAINS!

IT FELT SO NATURAL TO BE HOLDING A GUN AGAIN THAT HE HALF-FORGOT HIS NEW SITUATION!

HE'LL REGRET IT AT LEISURE. RIGHT **NOW**, HE GRABS THE CLOSEST PIECE OF FLYING DEBRIS...

CHUSH

...AND IMPROVISES.

HE'S GAINED AN ADVANTAGE.

NO REASON TO CELEBRATE THOUGH. **WOUNDING** A MACHINE ONLY LEAVES YOU WITH AN **ANGRY** MACHINE.

IT MUST BE **TERMINATED.**

THAT... ALMOST HURT.

YOU'VE *SCARRED* ME FOR A *SECOND* TIME.

I CAN'T *HAVE* THAT!

KRAKOOM!

BAD JOKE.

BUD, YOU WANT TO SEE SCARRED?

I'LL SHOW YOU HELL IN THE FLESH!

TAKE A GOOD LOOK.

I'M PATIENT.

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!

YOU LOOK LIKE CRAP!

Y'KNOW, THE SMELLY, OOZY KIND.

NOW I'M GONNA STOMP YOU--

--SO I CAN SCRAPE YOU OFF MY BOOT--

--YOU PIECE OF TURD!

RAM

BAM

BAM

BAM

SO WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?!!

I'VE FOUGHT YOUR KIND BEFORE. THIS IS WHERE THE FUN COMES IN.

KENK

PONG

SHKSK

WITH ALL THE NOISE THAT'S BEEN MADE, HE KNOWS THE AUTHORITIES WILL BE CALLED. HE NEEDS TO LEAVE.

BUT NOT BEFORE HE TAKES A MOMENT TO REVEL IN HIS HANDIWORK.

AND, NOT BEFORE HE SETS THE TIMER OF AN ELECTRO-MAGNETIC **BOMB.**

THAT SHOULD DO IT. CAN'T LEAVE ANY EVIDENCE BEHIND.

AS HE SLIPS AWAY INTO THE NIGHT, HE THINKS ABOUT HIS HOME IN THE ALLEY, AND HOW HE'LL CURL UP BEHIND SOME RUSTY DUMPSTER FOR A WELL-DESERVED NIGHT'S SLEEP.

A LONG, **COMFORTABLE** NIGHT.

y'know, seriously, that's gotta be the worst thing ever happened to me, that thing comin' outta the dark.

to be honest, i still don't think i'm completely over it.

i mean, nobody deserves **that!** not even, say, somebody who did twenty-seven kids and kept the bodies in his ice cream truck.

which i didn't.

and even if i **did**, isn't there a constitutional rights issue here? hmmm?

i mean, jeez, the guy coulda **killed** me!

it was unreal! i've, like, just finished putting number twenty-eight in the deep freeze, i hear these chains rattlin', okay? i turned around...

there was pain. then it got dark...

...and, frankly, i don't know where the hell i am right now.

i just noticed i'm not breathing inside this sack of syrup, so i guess i'm dead, and i've gone somewhere religious.

actually, thinking about it, this is not so good.

i'm sticky. i'm buck naked.

what kind of afterlife is this?

i have a problem with this naked stuff. so i kill this sorta four-eyed lizard thing and take its skin for clothing.

it's nice, knowing you can still kill things when you're dead.

i just wish there were more people around is all.

IN HEAVEN
(EVERYTHING IS FINE)

H-HELLO?

uh?

M-MY NAME'S *KIMBERLY*? AND, AND I HAVE THIS, LIKE, *EATING* DISORDER? AND NEXT THING I KNOW I'M A *FRUIT*, GROWING ON A *TREE*?

HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED TO *YOU*?

BECAUSE, Y'KNOW, SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED TO *ALL* THESE PEOPLE? ONE MINUTE *DYING*, NEXT MINUTE IN SOME *ORCHARD*?

outside the orchard there's nothing but wilderness. still, it's not like we got anywhere else to go.

jeez, what a buncha stiffs.

Oh, INCIDENTALLY, THIS IS *LARRY*, *CLAUDETTE*, *BOB*, AND LITTLE *JESSICA*?

AND YOU'RE MISTER...?

chill-ee. **mister** chill-ee. real name's **billy kincaid**.

mr. chill-ee's my **professional** name.

well, since we're in the same **boat**, it makes sense we stick **together**. I say first we get outta this **orchard**...

...before anything comes looking for **windfall**.

kid's cute, though.

THIS IS JUST SO ***WEIRD***, RIGHT, BECAUSE I DO A LOT OF ***CHANNELLING?*** TALKING TO ***DEAD*** PEOPLE? AND NONE OF THEM ***MENTIONED*** THIS?

THERE'S ***TEN*** DEAD-LANDS.

THIS IS JUST THE ***LOWEST*** SPHERE; THE ***RECEPTION AREA***. IF YOU WANT TO GO ***HIGHER*** YOU'LL HAVE TO CLIMB THE ***TOWER***...

OH! Oh, ***LORD!*** LOOK AT ***THIS***, EVERY-BODY!!

LIKE ***SPHERES***, ONE INSIDE ANOTHER.

HE'S ***COME*** FOR ME! I ***KNEW HE*** WOULD!

I WENT IN FOR MY ***GALL BLADDER*** OPERATION AN' I WOKE UP GROWIN' IN THAT ***ORCHARD*** BUT I KNEW *HE* WOULDN'T FORGET ME!

COMFORT-AND-JOY. SWEET-AND-LOW. BRIGHT-AND-BEAUTIFUL.

WHO-AMONGST-YOU-SINGETH-THESE-SONGS?

I DO, LORD! WHY, I SING 'EM ALL THE *TIME*!

BRIGHT. BEAUTIFUL.

COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HO-O-OME...

LISTEN, I'LL SING ONE FOR YOU *NOW* IF YOU'LL JUST TAKE ME *UP!*

HEY! THAT AIN'T NO ANGEL! IT'S GOT A WHADJA-CALLIT, MOTOR INNA BACK!

IT WAS A *SOUL-TRAPPER* FROM THE *SIXTH SPHERE*. THEY KEEP THE SOULS AS *PETS* THERE. IT'S A *FASHION* THING.

THIS YEAR IT'S *SINGERS*. LAST YEAR IT WAS *ACROBATS*.

OH, I LOOK ACROSS THE JORDAN, WHAT DO I SEE-EE...

I think about the kid as we camp down for the night. so she's a little autistic, whatever. disturbed. that's natural.

being dead, it's a disturbing thing.

but dying's worse.

í dream about ít all níght long. the sound of the chains. the cloak flappíng. spíkes. skulls.

í never want to see that thíng agaín.

by my reckoning, night lasts about three hours before we get up and move on. the daylight here is kinda funny.

no sun, for one thing.

we ain't set out five minutes when a ray from the sky disinegrates larry, the restaurant-owner and drug-deal fatality from michigan.

HMM. YOU DON'T SEE MANY OF ***THOSE***.

THAT WAS THE ***PRIME MONAD*** FROM THE HIGHEST SPHERE, THE TENTH. HE HAND-PICKS ***SOULS*** TO USE AS ***CIRCUITRY*** IN HIS ***MACRO-COMPUTER***.

i mean, that's gotta hurt, right?

YOUR FRIEND'S ***LUCKY***.

there's not enough of lucky larry to bury, so we move on. a way up the trail, fat bob from wisconsin spots somebody he knows...

HEY, LOOK EVERYBODY! IT'S ***ELVIS!***

bob! don't go **near** it! that isn't the **king!**

SURE IT IS.

HEY, KING! YA KNOW I WAS LISTENING TO "AN AMERICAN TRILOGY" WHEN I RAN MY ***PICK-UP*** UNDER THAT ***PETERBILT?***

bob!!

THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN ***DO*** FOR HIM! THAT'S A ***CTHUGAN METABUSE*** FROM THE ***FIFTH SPHERE.***

THEY GET AN ADDICTIVE ***DRUG RUSH*** FROM THE SOULS OF PEOPLE LIKE BOB!

this is great. three of us left. the kid's a psycho, i'm getting there, and kimberly ends every sentence with a question mark.

OH, YOU SEE THIS, THIS IS JUST LIKE A LUCKY CRYSTAL I HAD?

tell the truth, it doesn't exactly cripple me with grief when her pet rock swallows her whole, stands up and scuttles off.

the kid tells me it was a **soul-gourmet** from the third sphere.

the things they say, ya gotta love 'em.

pretty soon after that it gets dark, just all of a sudden how it does around here. the kid finds us a place where we can sleep...

...and dream.

a flight of bats surrouns his brow; his cloak that seethes like boiling blood and when the great chains smash together white hot sparks shower down about his feet...

how we died: is that all us dead people get to dream about?

i wake up in a cold sweat, and i know what's gotta be done. the kid's sleeping by the camp fire.

it's the only way. get it out of my system. stop the dreams.

look at her. always gets me, how they look when they're asleep. little jessica. little angel.

she ain't gonna know a thing about it.

WELL, IT'S ABOUT ***TIME!*** I WONDERED HOW LONG IT'D BE BEFORE YOU ***CROAKED*** THE KNOW-IT-ALL LITTLE BITCH!

GLAD TO SEE YOU STILL GOT WHAT IT ***TAKES,*** CHILL-EE!

Y'KNOW, FOR A ***WHILE*** THERE, WE WUZ SCARED YOU WERE GONNA **WUSS OUT** ON US!

GREAT DISGUISE, huh? I MEAN, FLIMSY, BUT CUTE AS HELL.

I'M ***THE VINDICATOR,*** ONE O' THE FIVE FAMOUS ***PHLEBIAC BROTHERS.*** I GUESS YOU PROBABLY HEARD O' US.

SORRY 'BOUT ***ENTRAPPIN'*** YA LIKE THAT. I JUST HADDA MAKE SURE YOU WUZ THE KINDA GUY WE WANTED UP ON THE ***EIGHTH SPHERE...***

HEY! WHEREAYA GOIN'? TRUST ME, YOU'LL *LIKE* THE EIGHTH SPHERE! *EVERYBODY* DOES!

THAT STUFF ABOUT IT BEING A "REEKING, SULPHUROUS TORTURE-FURNACE" WAS JUST *RUMORS*, SPREAD BY *BUSINESS RIVALS!*

THOSE *SOUL-SCALPERS* ON THE SECOND, I BET. THEY GOT IT IN FOR US!

i gotta get outta here. the kid... that thing... said the only way out was up the **tower.**

y'know, maybe i still got a **chance!**

BOY, THESE ***STAIRS***, huh? ARE THEY MURDER OR WHAT? I TELL 'EM, "PUT IN AN ELEVATOR. ONE O' THEM GLASS ONES."

I MEAN, SURE, THIS IS HELL, BUT WHY THEY GOTTA MAKE THINGS ***DIFFICULT*** FOR PEOPLE?

hhhuggh. hhhhuughhh. i can't...

...can't go any further...

hhhughhh.

I

HEY! NO *PROBLEMO!*

YOU WANNA BE A FUR COAT FOR SOME HYPER-INTELLIGENT *ICE-SHRIMP* ON THE SECOND SPHERE?

I MEAN, JUST *SAY!* I CAN DROP YOU RIGHT *OFF!*

II

OR WHAT ABOUT THE *THIRD* SPHERE? HONEST, I'D UNDER-STAND.

GETTING FILLETED AND SERVED WITH A LIGHT PASTRY IS WHAT SOME GUYS LIKE, I KNOW THAT.

III

BUT Y'SEE, YOU, YOU'RE *SPECIAL*. YOU'RE A DEAD CHILD MURDERER, AND WE *APPRECIATE* THAT IN A GUY.

I WAS GONNA *CARRY* YA IF YA HADN'T RUN *OFF* LIKE THAT!

YOU OUGHTTA THINK YOURSELF *LUCKY* YOU BIN HARVESTED BY THE *EIGHTH*. I MEAN, A DEAD GUY LIKE YOU, WHAT ARE HIS *OPTIONS?*

IV

I MEAN, HERE ON THE *FOURTH* YOU'D BE A *FUEL-ROD!*

I SEEN YOU IN ACTION, MR. CHILL-EE, AN' I GOTTA SAY YOU'RE TOO *GOOD* FOR THAT!

NO WAY ARE YOU GONNA END UP AS *NOSE CANDY* FOR SOME FIFTH-SPHERE HIPPY *META-SQUID*...

...OR SINGING GOSPEL FAVORITES IN AN ELECTRIFIED *BIRD-CAGE* HERE ON THE SIXTH.

AS FOR THE *SEVENTH* SPHERE, DON'T ASK. IT'S THIS PLACE CALLED *EREBUS*, BUT NOBODY'S EVER SEEN INSIDE.

WE FIGURE IT'S SOME *SPECIAL HELL* FOR THE MOST *DAMNABLE* CREATURES OF ALL.

I

CULTURE AIN'T FOR US. WE'RE MORE STRANGLE-'EM-AN'-STICK-'EM-IN-THE-FREEZER KINDA GUYS.

II

NOW **THIS**, THIS PLACE YOU'RE GONNA *LIKE!* SOME CALL IT THE *EIGHTH SPHERE*, SOME CALL IT *THE MALEBOLGE*, BUT *ME*...

III

IV

V

VI

VII

I CALL IT HOME!

VIII

NOW, AS IT HAPPENS, THE ***MALEBOLGIA*** HIMSELF IS LOOKING FOR SOULS TO JOIN HIS ***ARMY.*** SOULS JUST LIKE ***YOU.***

WHAT'S UP?

this place is **hot!** it's burning my **feet!**

Oh, THAT WON'T BOTHER YOU ONCE YOU'RE FITTED OUT IN YOUR ***SLAVE'S WEAR.*** ALL THE MALEBOLGIA'S CONQUESTS WEAR IT.

HERE, I'LL WHISTLE YOURS UP...

PHWEEEEET!

LEMME INTRODUCE ***K3-MYRLU.*** SHE'S A CONSTANTLY-EVOLVING ***NEURAL PARASITE*** AND I THINK SHE ***LIKES*** YOU.

NO! no, not **that!**

Oh, COME ON!

LOOK, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING: "NEURAL PARASITES! THEY'RE ONLY AFTER ONE THING!" BUT JUST GIVE IT A CHANCE IS WHAT I'M SAYIN'.

BELIEVE ME, I HAVE A FEELIN' YOU GUYS ARE GONNA BE VERY CLOSE.

EEEAAAGH!

AW, LOOK! SHE'S **BONDING!** I TELLYA, WHEN A GAL LIKE K3-MYRLU **BONDS** WITH YA, YA GOTTA REMEMBER **TWO THINGS...**

FIRST, IT'S FOR LIFE.

SECOND, IT'S WITH YOUR **CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM.**

WOW! WILLYA LOOK AT THAT **SALIVA** JUST DRIPPING OFF HER **EXO-FANGS?** SHE REALLY LIKES YOU, I CAN TELL.

THERE! I TELLYA, YOU AIN'T GONNA GET A NEAT DESIGNER UNIFORM LIKE **THAT** WORKIN' IN NO **FAST FOOD FRANCHISE!**

FIFTY YEARS BACK WE GOT A **LOT** O' THEM FASHION-PLATE **NAZIS** UP HERE, AN' THEY **RAVED** ABOUT IT!

SO ANYWAY, NOW YOU'RE ALL DRESSED UP, GO MEET YOUR NEW ***EMPLOYER!*** LOOK... THE GATES ARE OPENIN' FOR YA!

but... but this isn't **fair!**

the afterlife shouldn't **be** this way, full of alien **monsters** processing humans as if they were **cattle,** and nobody caring about **good** or **evil!**

GOOD? *EVIL?* GIMME A *BREAK!*

LIKE WE COULD CARE LESS IF YOU'RE COVETIN' YOUR NEIGHBOR'S **OX** OR WHATEVER!

I MEAN, WE'RE RUNNIN' A ***BUSINESS*** HERE...

...AN' I TELLYA FOR ***NOTHIN'***, THE TWO WORDS CARVED ON MARBLE IN HELL'S ***LOBBY*** AIN'T "***GOOD***" OR "***EVIL***".

IT'S TWO ***OTHER*** WORDS, AN' WHAT THEY SAY IS ***THIS...***

HA HA HA

MERCY! HELP ME!

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, WILL NO-ONE COME? WILL NO-ONE SAVE US?

HELLSPAWN:

Identification: The livery of Hell (see illustrations pages 1131-1150 for basic design and variants) is a sentient carapace, which covers the Hellspawn. Many Hellspawn are shapeshifters.

PLEASE... HELP ME...

CHARACTERISTICS:

In this manual we shall address only Hellspawn in the Worlds of the Living. Hellspawn in the Realms Beyond are not Game, and cannot be hunted unless and until a formal condition of War has been declared. Caution is always advised.

Those Hellspawn in the Living Worlds are, however, fair game. They are the officer material that Malebolgia considers may prove worthy of high rank in The War To Come. Its usual technique is to consign them to Earth with a high, although limited, supply of power.

GOOD DAY, SWEET MAIDEN. YOU ARE HURT.

I AM HURT, MY LORD, BUT I AM A MAIDEN NO LONGER.

YOU NEED HELP.

HUNTING METHODS:

Young Hellspawn make the best sport.

IT IS NOT *I* WHO NEEDS HELP, MY LORD, BUT MY *SISTER*. THE *OGRE* WHO DEALT WITH ME THUS HAS TAKEN HER BACK TO HIS CAVE.

GREAT LORD, MY SISTER IS LITTLE MORE THAN A *CHILD*...

WHERE IS THIS OGRE?

THROUGH THE *GLEN*, THERE. IN A CAVE UNDER THE WATER-FALL.

Firstly, they are often time-disoriented, having been kept in Stasis fields for five to ten years. Our opponent has found that releasing them into what is, for them, their near future, obliterates and confuses family and emotional connections.

The young hellspawn are often confused and emotional, and respond to 'good' or 'noble' impulses as easily -- or more easily -- than they do to 'evil'. This tendency can be exploited by any experienced hunter.

MY LORD-- *WHY* DO YOU COVER YOUR *FACE*?

YOU WOULD NOT **WISH** TO SEE MY FACE, SWEET MAIDEN.

YOUR SISTER, YOU SAY...?

I ALSO HAD A SISTER, BEAUTIFUL AND WISE, WHOM I SWORE I WOULD SEE MARRIED BEFORE I **DIED**.

AND *DID* YOU?

I... WENT **AWAY**, FOR MANY YEARS. WHEN I... RETURNED, MY SISTER WAS INDEED MARRIED...

NOT TO THE MAN I WOULD HAVE CHOSEN, ALAS. IF WE **KNEW** THE FUTURE, WELL, WHAT **THEN**?

Secondly, and more importantly, the young Hellspawn has learned nothing about the harnessing and control of its abilities-- some of which, particularly those concerning transmutation and reality adjustment, it may never fully learn or control. It is a thing of raw, but unfocussed power, and an intelligent hunter can turn this to advantage.

As Hellspawn get older they also get wilier and more ruthless. They also become much more careful of power expenditure, something with which young Spawn are rash and reckless.

Thirdly, by destroying Hellspawn young, a hunter is performing a valuable service. Each Hellspawn is a potential officer in the army of Hell. The discovery and empowering of a Hellspawn takes much energy and time on the part of the Malebolgia; thus far it has not created more than one in 50 years, and usually not more than one a century.

At the point where its power reservoir is exhausted the Earth-bound Hellspawn return to the Ninth Level. At this point they face the Ordeal of the Dark Carcass.

YOU HAVE NOT TOLD ME YOUR ***NAME,*** MY LORD.

I NO **LONGER** HAVE A NAME.

THERE! THAT IS THE CAVE, IN WHICH THE OGRE HAS MY SISTER. MY LORD, HE IS MOST ***STRONG*** AND ***FEARSOME...***

I ALSO AM MOST STRONG AND FEARSOME. YOU SHALL WAIT HERE.

Those who pass become officers in the Army of Hell. Those who fail become food for the soldiers of Hell. Either way, the power of the Malebolge has increased.

Some older Hellspawn can become quite desperate when they realize what waits for them at the point of power depletion, and will go through quite remarkable efforts to avoid battle or any further depletion of energy.

I WILL COME IN WITH YOU. I KNOW THE SECRETS OF THE CAVERN, AFTER ALL.

IT IS VERY DARK.

YOU ARE A WIZARD!

VERY WELL.

NO WIZARD, FAIR ONE. ONCE I WAS A MAN... A BAD MAN... NOW... I KNOW NOT WHAT I AM.

THIS CAVE... HOW MUCH FURTHER MUST WE GO?

HUNTING METHODS:

Only a hunter with plenty of time on her hands, a full arsenal, and a willingness to undergo a potentially lengthy period of hardship and discomfort should even consider hunting Hellspawn.

Hellspawn hunting is unlike other methods of Hunting.

Stalking a Hellspawn is advisable. Learn its habits. The Hellspawn when roused are rapid and tireless.

It is wise to Decoy a Spawn, by diverting, its attention.

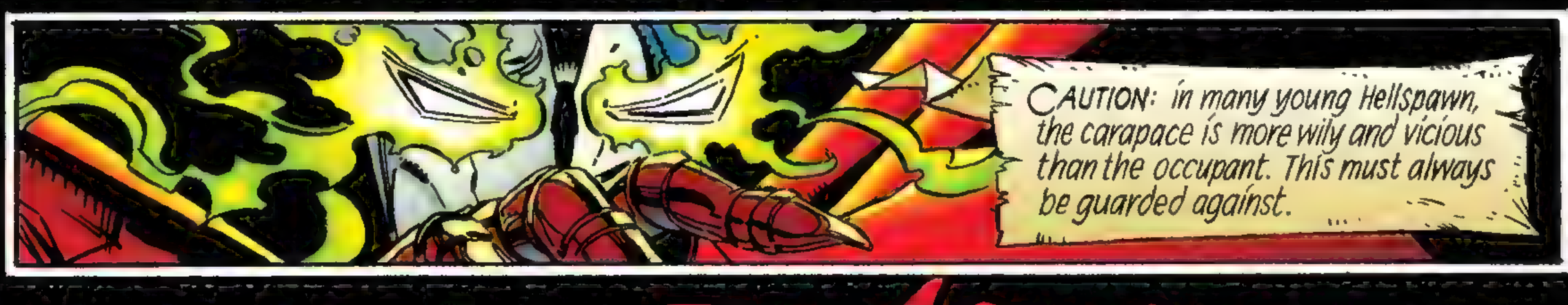
Oh, I THINK WE'VE COME FAR ENOUGH.

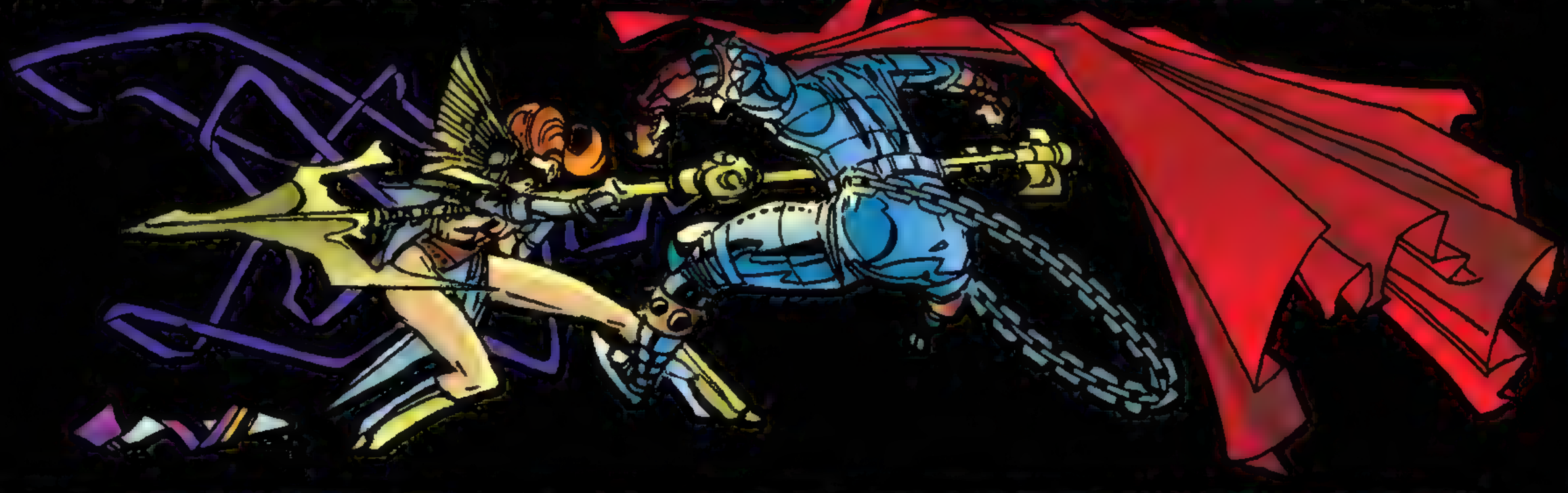
WHAT MAGIC IS THIS?

NO MAGIC, LITTLE HELL-SPAWN.

A first hard strike will often take a Spawn out.

5:4: 7:8


CAUTION: In many young Hellspawn, the carapace is more wily and vicious than the occupant. This must always be guarded against.



WHAT... WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE ARE YOU?

YOU'RE ONE MORE LITTLE *PAWN* WHO WILL *NEVER* BECOME A QUEEN.

YOU'RE IN THE *ARMY*. HAVEN'T YOU EVER WONDERED *WHO* YOU WERE MEANT TO BE *FIGHTING*?

POOR HELLSPAWN. YOU AREN'T THAT *BRIGHT*, ARE YOU?

WEAPONRY:
A multitude of weapons can be used to weaken and goad the creature: needlebands, stoners, mutileers, and morningstars, amongst others, according to the hunter's own preferences. (See part XIII "WEAPONRY," chapters 97-104)

However, the most important weapon, and that without which hunting Spawn is not only foolish, but pointless, and virtually suicidal, is the Lance.

The Hellspawn's Carapace sets up interference that will prevent the Lance from activating. It needs to be close in to the Hellspawn before being activated.

Once activated it sets up a dimensional resonance that will lance the Hellspawn from this level of existence like pus from a boil.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

CLICK

"WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE"? OH, *POOR* LITTLE HELLSPAWN. YOU HAVE BEEN *HUNTED*...

NOW YOU'LL *NEVER* BE A CAPTAIN IN THE ARMY OF THE MALEBOLGIA.

AAAA

AAAAAAAA

If the carapace is left behind at this point, it will be in a weakened condition, and easily terminated.

Then all you need to do is take your trophy back, and bask in the praise and admiration of your fellow hunters.

AAAAGH!

800 years later.

HEY, MISTER.

uhn...

NOT A *MORNING* PERSON, *huh? I* CAN DIG IT.

JUST THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO KNOW. THE *COPS* WUZ AROUND AGAIN THIS MORNING. THEY WUZ ASKIN' WHETHER WE'D SEEN SOME GUY IN A BIG CLOAK.

THEY GOT ONE-A THEM *THINGS*. Y'KNOW. *ARTIST'S RENDITION.*

NOT A *BAD* ONE AT THAT.

WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM?

LESSEE. I SAID, I AIN'T SEEN NOTHING. JIMMY D., HE SAID HE HADN'T SEEN NOTHING. SHERLOCK, HE JUST BELCHED AND MADE LIKE HE WAS GOING TO THROW UP.

AN' TRICKY DICK, HE TOL' 'EM HE'D SEEN YOU ALRIGHT, AN' FOR A DOLLAR HE'D TELL 'EM WHERE. SO THEY GAVE HIM A DOLLAR, AND HE SEZ HE SEES YOU FLYING OVER THE CITY EVERY MORNING, IN A GIANT PINK CADILLAC, WITH A BIG GREEN GORILLA.

HE TOLD THEM HE THINKS YOU NEST INNA CHRYSLER BUILDING.

THAT DICKY. WHADDA SCREAM, huh? I TELLYA, IFI HE RAN AGAIN, I'D VOTE FOR HIM, WATERGATE OR NO WATERGATE.

I'M GRATEFUL. DO YOU THINK THEY'LL BE BACK?

THEY'LL KEEP COMING BACK. WE'LL KEEP COVERING FOR YOU.

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO FOR YOU IN RETURN?

AFTER WHAT THE COPS DID TO JOEY?*WHAT THE MOB DID TO FREDDY? STICKIN' IT TO ANY OF THEM IN ANY WAY WE CAN...

HEY. IT'S A PLEASURE.

*SPAWN #5 -- TOM.

NOW, JACK-BOY, DON'T YOU BE SO ***HASTY.*** IT AIN'T ***OFTEN*** WE HAVE AN OFFER LIKE THAT.

SAY... IF YOU COULD ***CREATE*** FOR US MAYBE A CRATE OF ***STRAWBERRY RIPPLE WINE,*** I THINK WE COULD CONSIDER ALL DEBTS SETTLED.

I'M NOT SURE THAT I...

YOU JUST HAVE HAVE TO ***CLOSE*** YOUR EYES AND ***CONCENTRATE,*** LAD.

FEEL IT ***DEEP INSIDE*** YOURSELF.

NO... NOT LIKE ***THAT.*** YOU DO IT LIKE THAT, YOU'LL JUST LOWER YOUR ***ENERGY*** LEVELS.

8:0:3:1

IT WORKED!

SURE IT DID.

THE TRICK IS PULLING ENERGY FROM YOUR ***COSTUME.*** IT'S A NEURAL PARASITE AFTER ALL, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T ***BORROW*** A LITTLE ENERGY FROM ***IT*** IN RETURN...

HEY. Y'KNOW, *SOME* BUMS TALK ABOUT CHAUTEAU LAFITE, OR MOUTON ROTHSCHILD, OR THAT FANCY STUFF. BUT FOR *MY* MONEY *NOTHIN'* COMPARES TO A GOOD 1989 STRAWBERRY RIPPLE.

HEY, KID, YOU'RE *OKAY.*

YEAH? WELL, **THANK** YOU, MISTER...

COUNT. COUNT NICHOLAS CAGLIOSTRO.

AT YOUR *SERVICE,* Mr SIMMONS.

LOOKY ELV. IT SAYS IN THE *WEEKLY WORLD NEWS* YOU JUST GOT MARRIED AGAIN.

NOT ME, SUH. *Uh-uh.*

WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?

IS Ms GABRIELLE AVAILABLE ?

DO YOU HAVE AN APPOINT-MENT?

I DON'T **NEED** AN APPOINT-MENT.

JUST TELL HER THAT *ANGELA'S* HERE TO SEE HER.

SHE SAYS YOU SHOULD GO STRAIGHT IN.

HELLO, GABRIELLE.

ANGELA.

YOU'RE LOOKING *WONDERFUL.*

I'M LOOKING *ALMOST* THE SAME AS THE *LAST* TIME YOU SAW ME. WHEN YOU DESCRIBED ME AS A *PASTY-FACED, RUNTY LITTLE DESK-BOUND BUREAUCRAT OBSESSED WITH TINY DETAILS AND WITH NO PROSPECTS OF PROMOTION.*

DID I SAY THAT?

WHY, YES YOU DID.

AND NOW *I'M* THE DIRECTOR OF TERRAN AFFAIRS, AND *YOU'RE* STILL A *FREELANCER.*

SO. THIS WHOLE *WORLD* IS MY REGION OF RESPONSIBILITY, SINCE RAPHAELA WAS CALLED UPSTAIRS.

I KNOW.

AND I'M *VERY* BUSY. SO IF YOU THINK I'M LETTING YOU GET OUT *THERE* AND MAKE MY JOB ANY HARDER, YOU'D BETTER THINK *AGAIN.*

Oh, BUT THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT I *AM* THINKING.

THIS HAD BETTER BE *GOOD.*

IT *IS.* IT'S A *HUNTING PERMIT.*

I SEE.

PUT THAT AWAY, ANGELA.

OKAY. BUT NONE OF THAT STALKING AND TRAILING NONSENSE.

I *CAN'T* STOP YOU FROM HUNTING. BUT I WANT THIS ONE *QUICK* AND *CLEAN.*

FOR THE LAST TIME: I WANT TO KNOW **HOW** YOU KNEW I WAS **AL SIMMONS.**

JEEZ. YOU'RE A GOOD KID, BUT YOU'RE REALLY ***NOT*** VERY BRIGHT. YOU GOT A ***WAY*** TO GO.

I MEAN, I KNEW ALL ABOUT YOUR ***COSTUME.*** ***THAT*** DIDN'T PHASE YOU.

SO I ***KNOW*** ABOUT THE ***MALEBOLGIA*** ...

THE WHAT?

THE GUY YOU DID THE ***DEAL*** WITH. YOU KNOW, "*GIVE ME MY WIFE BACK AND I'LL SERVE YOU FOREVER.*" ***THAT*** GUY.

Hm. ***YES.*** I'D ***HEARD*** THAT A NEW HELLSPAWN HAD SURFACED. IT'S NOT EXACTLY ***HIGH.*** ON MY LIST OF PRIORITIES...

I SEE. SO YOU KNOW THAT I DID A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL.

YOU DID A DEAL WITH THE *DEVIL*, huh? YOU HADN'T EVEN STOPPED TO THINK ABOUT WHICH *ONE*?

WHICH ONE? THERE IS ONLY ONE. THE DEVIL.

YOU REALLY *DON'T* GET IT.

THEIR DEVIL GAVE THEM POWER AND WEALTH AND LOVE AND FAME, *EVERYTHING* THEY'D EVER WANT. THEN HE COLLECTED, AND THEY HAVE TO BE BUMS IN ALLEYWAYS FOR THE NEXT HOW-EVER LONG.

LISTEN, KID, HALF THE GUYS IN THIS *ALLEY* DID A DEAL WITH A DEVIL AT SOME POINT.

LOOK, SONNY. THERE'S A *LOT* YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND ABOUT WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING TO YOU...

EXCUSE ME. CAN WE *TALK*?

HUH? WHO ARE YOU?

MEN CALL ME ANGELA.

LOOK, ANGELA, IF YOU DON'T MIND... I'M KIND OF **BUSY** RIGHT NOW. AND I'VE GOT A **LOT** ON MY MIND.

I *KNOW*. THAT'S HOW I GOT THIS *CLOSE*.

HEY, LADY. I **DON'T** WANT TO **HURT** YOU.

I *KNOW*. I DON'T WANT TO HURT *YOU EITHER*. I WANT TO *DESTROY* YOU.

PLEASE...

PLEASE.
I CAN'T...

WOW.

HEY, SIMMONS, THAT WAS *PRETTY* IMPRESSIVE. YOU DON'T *OFTEN* SEE AN *ANGEL* TAKE OFF LIKE A *BAT* OUTTA *HELL*. *Heheheh...*

THAT WAS AN **ANGEL**? BUT SHE TRIED TO **KILL** ME!

LIKE I *SAID*. THERE'S A *LOT* YOU DON'T KNOW.

SHE DROPPED **THIS**.

PUT THAT *DOWN*. DON'T *TOUCH* IT!

BUT WHAT **IS** IT? WHAT DOES IT **DO**?

THERE'S SOME KIND OF **BUTTON** ON THE SIDE...

CLICK

I SAID **DON'T!!**

LIKE I *SAID*. A *GOOD* KID. JUST *NOT* VERY BRIGHT.

HEY GUYS. *I'M* OUTTA HERE.

PITY. SIMMONS SHOWED *POTENTIAL*. HE *COULDDA* BEEN THE *ONE*...

DAVE SIM

I AM SPAWN.

I AM NOT SPAWN.

I AM SPAWN FOR I SHARE ALL OF HIS MEMORIES.

I REMEMBER MY/HIS DEATH.

THE SKELETAL FACE WHICH HAUNTS HIS DAYS AND HIS NIGHTS HAUNTS ME AS WELL.

I KNOW THE BURNING GAZE OF THE VIOLATOR AND THE STENCH OF HIS HOT BREATH.

I KNOW WANDA AND I KNOW CYAN.

I CAN STILL FEEL. FEEL THE ACHE OF MY (HIS) HEART BEING RIPPED FROM MY (HIS) CHEST.

I CAN STILL SEE IT BEATING IN THE HAND OF THE VIOLATOR...

...MY... (HIS)... HEART.

I AM NOT SPAWN

FOR I KNOW MANY THINGS SPAWN DOESN'T KNOW

I KNOW THE NAMES OF THE TWO DETECTIVES WHO PURSUE HIM...

I KNOW WHEN AND HOW THEY FINALLY MEET.

I KNOW WHY THE LITTLE ONE IS CALLED 'TWITCH'.

I KNOW THE HISTORIES OF EVERY ONE OF HIS FRIENDS AND EVERY ONE OF HIS ENEMIES... I KNOW THINGS ABOUT THEM...

...THAT THEY HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT THEMSELVES.

WHEN SPAWN GOES TO AL SIMMONS' GRAVE ONE DAY...

... AND STRIPS AWAY THE SOD AND DIGS DOWN THROUGH THE DARK EARTH...

...AND OPENS THE LID OF AL SIMMONS' COFFIN...

I KNOW WHAT HE WILL FIND THERE.

I AM NOT SPAWN.

UNLIKE SPAWN, I KNOW EVERY INCH OF THE NETWORK OF ALLEYWAYS WHICH CUT THROUGH THE CITY LIKE A SCAR THAT CAN NEVER HEAL PROPERLY.

I KNOW THAT THE ALLEYWAYS EXISTED BEFORE THE CITY ITSELF DID.

I KNOW THE TOWER IN HELL WHERE THE VIOLATOR DWELLS.

I KNOW EVERY LEVEL OF THE TOWER AND ALL WHO LIVE THERE... SCREAMING.

EVERY LEVEL. EXCEPT...

...EXCEPT ONE.

...EXCEPT LEVEL SEVEN.

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

...EXCEPT EREBUS.

I AM NOT SPAWN.

TELEPORTING DOESN'T DRAIN MY POWERS AS IT DOES HIS.

IT ISN'T EVEN LIKE TELE-PORTING.

IT'S AS IF I ALREADY EXIST EVERYWHERE IN SPAWN'S WORLD.

I HAVE ONLY TO FOCUS CLEARLY ON A SPECIFIC LOCATION

AND I AM THERE.

NOW.

NOW I WILL KNOW...

...EVERYTHING.

IT IS THE ALLEYWAY.

AND IT IS **NOT** THE ALLEY-WAY.

THERE IS A LINE OF MEN.

THEIR HANDS ARE BOUND BEHIND THEM.

THEY ARE HOODED.

HELPLESS.

I DON'T KNOW THEM...

...BUT I FEEL A CONNECTION TO THEM.

WITHOUT THEM.

WITHOUT THEM SPAWN (I... HE) COULD NOT EXIST.

Oh, God.

Oh, God no.

SOMETHING **(FLAMES)** LIGHTS THEIR FORMS.

SOMETHING **(TERRIBLE FLAMES)** BEFORE WHICH THEY TREMBLE WITH FEAR.

I DON'T WANT TO SEE.

BUT I LOOK ANYWAY.

I WANT TO KNOW EVERYTHING.

THEY ARE JUST.
THEY ARE NOBLE.
THEY ARE HEROES
CHAMPIONS.
WATCHMEN.
AVENGERS.
DEFENDERS.
MEN OF STEEL.
WOMEN OF TOMORROW.
GODS OF THUNDER.
CRUSADERS.
THEY ARE JUSTICE.
THEY ARE NOBILITY.
THEY ARE TRAPPED...
THEY ARE SCREAMING.
BEHIND ME, THE HOODED MEN TREMBLE.
BENEATH THEIR HOODS
THEY ARE WEEPING.
INJUSTICE! (HELP US.)
INJUSTICE! (SAVE US.)
INJUSTICE! (PLEASE.)
NOOO!

MY POWER LEAPS FROM ME BEFORE I'M EVEN AWARE THAT I'M USING IT! (I AM NOT SPAWN!)

MY POWER IS UNLIMITED AND DOES NOT DRAIN MY ENERGIES! (I AM NOT SPAWN!)

UNLIMITED POWER POUNDING AT THE BARS OF THIS PRISON! (I AM NOT SPAWN!)

UNIMAGINABLE POWER UNTIL THE AIR ITSELF IS AS HEAVY AS THE HEART OF A STAR!

NO EFFECT.

NONE.

THEIR HANDS RETREAT BEHIND THE BARS.

AND THEN, SUDDENLY, I CAN HEAR THEIR VOICES IN MY HEAD.

A HUNDRED VOICES (TAKE OUR POWER)...

A THOUSAND VOICES (TAKE OUR POWER)...

TEN THOUSAND (TAKE OUR POWER)

WE ARE THE HEROES BORN OF RADIATION. WE CAN DEMOLISH A CITY-BLOCK WITH A SINGLE BLOW.

OUR POWER IS YOURS, SPAWN. TAKE IT!

WE ARE THE HEROES BORN OF THE ELEMENTS OF EARTH AND AIR AND FIRE AND WATER. OUR STRENGTH IS THE STRENGTH OF ALL THAT EXISTS.

OUR POWER IS *YOURS,* SPAWN.

TAKE IT!

WE ARE THE HEROES BORN OF THE MYSTIC REALMS. OURS IS THE POWER OF ANCIENT WISDOM; OUR WEAPONS THE EYES OF GODS, MAGIC RODS TO FOCUS THE POWER OF THE COSMOS, ANCIENT SPELLS; WORDS THAT CAN SHIFT THE VERY AXIS OF THE MULTIVERSE.

OUR POWER IS YOURS, *SPAWN.*

TAKE IT!

AND THEN... A LONE VOICE. A VOICE FILLED WITH HOPE AND WITH GREAT CARING. STRONG AND NOBLE. THE VOICE OF HE-WHO-CAME-FIRST.

"MY PLANET EXPLODED AND I WAS SENT TO EARTH AS AN INFANT."

THE VOICE IS CALM.

"IT'S UP TO YOU, SPAWN. IT'S NOW OR NEVER."

"MY POWER IS YOURS, SPAWN.

"TAKE IT."

IN MY MIND, HE WINKS AT ME AND FLASHES A BROAD SMILE.

BENEATH MY MASK, I SMILE BACK AND NOD, SILENTLY.

THEIR POWER FLOWS INTO ME, SURGING THROUGH EVERY LIMB. **MY** POWER, WHICH I HAD THOUGHT TO BE UNLIMITED (I AM **NOT** SPAWN) IS AS NOTHING COMPARED TO THIS.

MY ARMS ARE THE EARTH AND THE STARS AND THE PLANETS AND ALL THE GALAXIES THAT EVER WERE OR EVER WILL BE.

THEY SWING FORWARD EASILY, ALL THE POWER NOW CONCENTRATED IN THE TIPS OF MY FINGERS.

AND I STRIKE.

NO EFFECT.

NONE.

IT IS THE VIOLATOR (IT IS **NOT** THE VIOLATOR). A WOMAN'S FIGURE WITH THE VIOLATOR'S HEAD, BLIND-FOLDED; HOLDING A SET OF SCALES.

IN ONE OF THE PANS, ALL THE WEALTH OF THE WORLD.

IN THE OTHER A BLACK, SHRIVELLED HEART, AWASH IN TEARS.

YOU *FAILED*, BUDDY BOY!

YOU *FAILED!* HA HA HA HA

YOU *FAILED*!

YOU *FAILED*!

YOU *FAILED*!!

HE WEARS A LONG DRESS MADE OF DOLLAR BILLS.

THERE MUST BE A BILLION OF THEM.

MORE, PROBABLY.

AND THEN THE VIOLATOR (**NOT** THE VIOLATOR) IS GONE AND THERE IS ONLY ME (I AM **NOT** SPAWN) AND THE LINE OF HOODED MEN BEHIND ME...

...WEEPING, SOFTLY.

BEHIND THE BARS, THE STAR-CHILD; HE-WHO-CAME-FIRST; THE ONE WHO IS THE BASIS FOR US... FOR **ALL** OF US... SAYS ONE WORD:

DOOMSDAY.

THERE IS NO FEAR IN HIS VOICE. NO DESPAIR. IT IS A SIMPLE STATEMENT OF FACT.

AND THEN ALL IS QUIET.

THE SILENCE IS DEAFENING.

THE SILENCE IS AGONY.

SPAWN.

C'MON.

LET'S GO.

BUT I HAVE TO SAVE THEM! I...

YOU CAN'T.

IT'S BEST NOT TO *THINK* ABOUT IT.

CEREBUS HAS BEEN HERE FIFTEEN YEARS.

CEREBUS *KNOWS.*

WHO...

WHO ARE THEY?

SUPER-HEROES.

LIKE YOU.

AND... THESE MEN...?

THEIR *CREATORS.* THE ONES WHO SOLD THEM.

LIKE CEREBUS SAID.

IT'S BEST NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.

C'MON.

CEREBUS WILL TAKE YOU HOME.

STOP FOR PEDESTRIANS

MARKET SQUARE

I LIVE... HERE?

NAW. THIS IS *CEREBUS'* HOME... *KITCHENER.* USED TO BE CALLED BERLIN... THIS IS *KING* AND *SCOTT* STREET.

Peter Place!

CEREBUS GREW UP HERE.

PETER'S PLACE IS ON YOUR LEFT.

CEREBUS SPENDS A LOT OF TIME THERE.

EVERYTHING IS... GRAY.

MM. BLACK AND WHITE *AND* GRAY.

SPAWN.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL HOUSE...

YEAH. WELCOME HOME.

HOME? MY HOME?!

SUNKEN LIVING ROOM. A WHOLE BUNCH OF BEDROOMS. FIREPLACE. GRAND PIANO.

GREAT VIEW OF MOUNT HOOD. HOT TUB. SATELLITE DISH.

AND ABOUT A MILLION *HOCKEY CARDS.*

YOUR WIFE WILL BE HOME SOON. *HER* NAME'S WANDA, TOO. NO BIG SURPRISE.

SHE'S A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER. A REAL LOOKER, TOO. YOU'LL SEE.

OH. AND YOU'RE GOING TO *LOVE* THIS...

YOU AND WANDA HAVE A *DAUGHTER.*

DADA!

HEY, IT'S OKAY.

LET IT OUT.

HOW... HOW...

YOUR CREATOR IS STILL WITH YOU. HE DIDN'T SELL YOU.

DADA!

IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.

WHAT IS IT, BABY, HUH? WHAT IS IT?

HER NAME'S CYAN.

CYAN. THAT'S A BEAUTIFUL NAME.

SHE'S...

...BEAUTIFUL.

BABIES ALL LOOK LIKE WINSTON CHURCHILL TO CEREBUS.

HEY. TO EACH HIS OWN.

SKTCH SKTCH

THIS IS WONDERFUL. I FEEL LIKE I'M DREAMING.

YOU'LL GET USED TO IT.

CAN YOU STAY?

I'VE GOT A MILLION QUESTIONS TO...

RRRING

HELLO? WHO? OH.

IT'S FOR YOU.

HELLO? HEY, MIKE. WHUSSUP?

YEAH YEAH, SURE... I'LL BE IN AFTER THE LEAF GAME.

YEAH... THEY'RE AT HOME WITH DETROIT THIS WEEKEND.

YEAH. I'LL SEE YOU THEN.

LATER.

DADDY'S HOME, BABY. DADDY'S HOME.

THANKS FOR THE INVITE, SPAWN, BUT... uh... FOUR'S A CROWD, Y'KNOW.

LISTEN... I... Uh... THANKS.

DON'T MENTION IT. TELL WANDA CEREBUS SAYS "HI"...

I SURE WILL.

I SURE WILL.

KLICK

KLACK

YES, WANDA.

YES, I DID.

I HAD A... BAD DREAM, I THINK. BUT... YOU KNOW...

...IT'S BEST NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT.

HI, HONEY! I'M HOME!

DID YOU HAVE A NICE DAY?

♪ DADDA! DADDA! ♪

SPAWN

is trademark
and copyright

Todd McFarlane

CEREBUS

is trademark
and copyright

Dave Sim

Forever

NEXT: *FRANK MILLER*

ISSUE 11

NOW, LET'S GET BACK TO **REALITY.**

SPAWN'S BEEN HAVING **NIGHTMARES.**

THAT'S THE ONLY EXPLANATION.

AL! FOR CHRISSAKE, BUDDY!

SNAP OUT OF IT!

YEAAHG!

GGREAYAHHH!!

IT AIN'T *REAL*, BOY! COME *ON!* THEY'LL CALL THE *COPS* ON US!

HE'S GOT IT *BAD*, YES HE DOES.

SORRY ABOUT THIS, AL.

SLAAK

BLARGG!

YOURGG!

hnh ?

BOBBY.

AND BOOTS.

GUYS. IT'S YOU.

THANK GOD.

Oh, MOTHER. THAT WAS TOO DAMN WEIRD. DEMONS AND NEW AGE GIRLS AND REALLY MEAN ANGELS AND A TALKING AARDVARK...

... A TALKING AARDVARK...

HE SMOKED. TOO

AARDVARK, huh? WITH ME IT'S USUALLY RATS AND LIZARDS. AND BEETLES. I GET A LOT OF BEETLES.

I MOSTLY GET BATS.

IT'S THE *WINE*, YES IT IS.

BUT I DON'T **DRINK**, DAMN IT!

SORRY. I'M HAVING A ROUGH TIME.

YOU KNOW, BIG GUY, WE'VE BEEN HANGING OUT FOR A WHILE NOW-- BUT I AIN'T HEARD SO MUCH AS A ***SOB STORY*** OUTTA YOU. NOT SO MUCH AS A ***SHE DONE ME WRONG.***

I DON'T MEAN TO POKE MY NOSE WHERE IT DON'T BELONG, BUT WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?

THAT'S A LONG STORY. AND IT DOESN'T HAVE A PUNCHLINE. LET'S JUST SAY THAT ALL I KNOW IS THAT I'M KIND OF LIKE **BOOTS**, OVER THERE.

HE'S SO IN LOVE WITH THOSE BOOTS OF HIS, THAT'S WHAT WE CALL HIM. THEY'RE ALL HE'S GOT, SO HE TAKES CARE OF THEM.

AND ALL I'VE GOT IS YOU GUYS AND THIS ALLEY. YOU'RE MY FRIENDS-- AND THIS IS MY **HOME.**

BOOM

YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY, AL! THAT'S GOT TO BE THE COPS!

NO. THAT'S A FIFTY-MILLIMETER TSUNAMI. IT'S JAPANESE. COPS DON'T USE IT. IT'S MILITARY.

SPAWN HAS SEEN THIS WEAPON IN ACTION BEFORE. BACK WHEN HE WAS **AL SIMMONS** AND HE WAS **ALIVE.**

IT'S A HAND-HELD **TANK STOPPER.** IT CAN REDUCE A **BRADLEY** TO **SHRAPNEL** WITH A SINGLE **SHOT.**

BOOM

USE IT ON A **HUMAN** AND YOU'RE TALKING **SPAGHETTI SAUCE.**

THE LUMPY KIND.

JEEZ LOUISE--

--WHAT A BOOM!

THE DAMN THING BRINGS BACK ALL THE WRONG KIND OF MEMORIES.

SAVE ME.

YAAGHH!

BOOM

SAVE

SPAGHETTI SAUCE. THE LUMPY KIND. THAT'S WHAT THEY'D BOTH BE IF AL SIMMONS WERE STILL ALIVE. STILL HUMAN.

BUT FOR THE GIRL, IT DOESN'T MAKE A SPECK OF DIFFERENCE.

FOR THE GIRL, DEAD IS DEAD.

YOU SUNNUVABITCH! YOU KILLED MY PAL.

MAYBE I'LL KILL YOU TOO, YOU DRUNK OLD TURD.

I GOT A CASE OF THE *NASTIES* TONIGHT.

ME TOO.

BAD CASE.

YOUR FAULT.

JUMER

AL.

JEEZ LOUISE.

THIS

CAN'T BE HAPPENING.

I DON'T GET IT, AL. FIRST YOU'RE DREAMING ABOUT TALKING AARD-VARKS, THEN YOU'RE DEAD--

--THEN YOU'RE NOT DEAD AND THEN YOU GOT THAT PUNK RIGHT WHERE YOU WANT HIM THEN YOU LET HIM GO--

-- AND STILL THERE'S A HOLE THROUGH YOU BIGGER THAN MY FIST. I'M CONFUSED.

*THE PUNK WOULD BE **EASY** TO KILL-- AND SPAWN IS **TEMPTED.***

*BUT SOMETHING'S **HAPPENING** HERE-- SOMETHING THAT MIGHT **THREATEN** THE FILTHY STRETCH OF PAVEMENT THAT SPAWN CALLS **HOME.***

*AND THERE'S THE **GIRL.** "SAVE ME," SHE SAID.*

HE DIDN'T.

*WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE? WHAT ARE THEY **DOING** HERE? WHERE'D THE PUNK GET THAT **CANNON?***

*THE PUNK WILL BE **EASY** TO FOLLOW-- AND MAY LEAD SPAWN TO SOME **ANSWERS.***

THEN, PERHAPS, THE KILLING STARTS.

*BUT FIRST, PRECIOUS **ENERGY** SPENT.*

AND NOW THERE'S NO HOLE. COULD'VE PUT MY FIST RIGHT THROUGH IT A MINUTE AGO AND NOW THERE'S NO HOLE. YOU'RE SOME STRANGE KIND OF GUY, AL. TRULY UNIQUE.

AAA

YEAH, YEAH, I *DID* THAT *CREEP* CHICK, ALL RIGHT? BUT I RUN *INTO* SOMETHING *REALLY WEIRD*.

IT WAS A *GUY* OR SOMETHING. IT WAS HARD TO TELL *WHAT*, WITH ALL THE *CAPE* AND *CHAINS* AND EVERYTHING--

--BUT IT TOOK A *DIRECT HIT*-- IT HAD A *HOLE* RIGHT THROUGH ITS *CHEST* AND IT GOT BACK *UP!*

YOU'VE BEEN DOING SOMETHING YOU *SHOULDN'T*, HAVEN'T YOU, BOOMER? SOMETHING THAT GOES IN YOUR *ARM*. OR UP YOUR *NOSE*. OR DOWN YOUR *THROAT*. SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU VERY, VERY *STUPID*.

THAT'S VERY *BAD*, BOOMER. YOU *KNOW* THE RULES. YOU JOIN THE *NERDS* AND YOU STAY *CLEAN* SO YOU DON'T START *SEEING* THINGS.

BYRON-- HELP ME *ADVISE* HIM.

"*CREEPS*"?

"*NERDS*"?

GANG NAMES. STREET GANGS.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN THERE'S A GAG FROM THE ONE THEY CALL "BOOMER"-- THERE'S A HISS, HYDRAULIC...

THIS IS BYRON™

CYBORG ENFORCER FOR THE NERD GANG. BIG AND MEAN AND STUPID AS THEY COME.

NERDS STAY CLEAN. IT'S THE RULE. NERDS STAY CLEAN.

VERY WELL SPOKEN, BYRON. THANK YOU.

WE *STAY CLEAN*, BOOMER. WE *DON'T DO DRUGS*. WE *DON'T SELL DRUGS*. WE *EAT* OUR *JUNK FOOD* AND WE *STEAL* OUR *ELECTRONICS EQUIPMENT* AND WE *KILL CREEPS*.

GLAGG

I'M *CLEAN*, NORTON! I *SWEAR!*

WE DON'T SWEAR EITHER, BOOMER! WE DO WHAT WE'RE TOLD!

WHITE MIDDLE CLASS COMPUTER GEEK STREET GANGS.

AT LEAST IT'S NOT A TALKING AARDVARK...

BRING HIM DOWN HERE SO THAT I CAN YELL AT HIM SOME MORE, BYRON.

THANK YOU, BYRON.

WHAT WE'RE TOLD. WE ARE NERDS.

GLUKK

I *DONE* WHAT YOU *TOLD* ME TO, NORTON! I *DID* THE *CREEP* CHICK. I'M JUST TELLING YOU THERE'S A *PROBLEM* WITH THAT *ALLEY* WE'RE SUPPOSED TO TAKE.

MAYBE WE SHOULD STAY *AWAY* FROM IT.

STAY AWAY FROM IT?!

THAT ALLEY WILL GIVE US A CORRIDOR--RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF CREEP TURF!

BESIDES, THEY WANT IT NOW! AND WHAT DO NERDS DO?

GLAGGG

ZAP

NERDS KILL CREEPS. WE ARE NERDS.

I WANT *HIM* TO SAY IT!

SAY IT, BOOMER! NERDS KILL CREEPS!

SAY IT!

Oh, NUTS. HE'S TOAST.

SORRY.

A TURF WAR--AND SPAWN'S *HOME* IS RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT.

POWER DEPLETED, FIXING HIS CHEST. TOO MANY GUNS DOWN THERE TO GO AFTER THEM RIGHT NOW, ANYWAY.

IT'S THE WRONG TIME FOR AN ATTACK. HE LEARNED TO TELL THE **DIFFERENCE**--BACK IN THE **WARS**.

THAT'S RIGHT. THINK LIKE A **SOLDIER**.

THERE'S AN IMPORTANT **RULE** TO WAR. IF ALL YOU'RE DOING IS **DEFENSE**, YOU'RE **SCREWED**.

YOU HAVE TO **CREATE** THE **SITUATION**.

BUT FIRST OF ALL, YOU WATCH OUT FOR YOUR **BUDDIES**...

MEANWHILE.

BACK AT THE ALLEY.

BACK HOME.

POOR DEAR. POOR DEAR.

YEAH, BUT WE GOT US A *PROBLEM*, BOOTS! WE CAN'T LEAVE A *DEAD BODY* LYING AROUND HERE--

--AND WE CAN'T STICK *AROUND* IF WE *DO!* THE *COPS'LL* BE ALL *OVER* US!

MAYBE THERE'S ROOM AT THE MISSION...

GIANK GIPPLE GIANK

GET *AWAY* FROM HER, YOU *BUMS!*

THIS IS JAMES™

*CYBORG ENFORCER FOR THE **CREEP** GANG. BIG AND MEAN, BUT RATHER EMOTIONAL.*

BUFFY! OH, SWEET BUFFY...

DON'T MIND US.

WE WERE JUST LEAVING...

THE NERDS WILL *PAY* FOR THIS. HEADS WILL *ROLL*. GUTS WILL *FLY*.

I'M GONNA GO ON A *RAMPAGE*, AS SOON AS I GET PERMISSION.

BuT FIrST, I GotTA *ShOW* THOSe NERdS tHIS aLLeY BELOnGS tO ThE *CReEPS*.

Ulp!

í GOTTa *mARK* iT. In *BLOoD*.

YoU LOoK LIkE YOu GOt *LOtS* Of BLOOd IN yOU.

BOOM

CRAP.

MFFT...

SURE. THIS IS A SMELLY, FILTHY RATHOLE OF AN ALLEY.

BUT IT'S MY SMELLY, FILTHY RATHOLE OF AN ALLEY.

GET LOST!

GYAA!

HeY! THíS IS REaLLY *UPSetTING* mE, YoU *JERk!*

YEAAAHG!

YoU cOMiNG AT mE LiKE ThiS IN MY HoUR OF GrIEF. YoU nOT sHOWiNG Me ONe ShRED oF COMPASSIOn.

CHAK CHAK CHAK CHAK CHAK

THIS IS NO GOOD...

POOM! POOM!

...EVEN IF I BEAT THIS GUY-- THERE'LL BE MORE-- FROM BOTH SIDES.

I'VE GOT TO CREATE THE SITUATION.

POOM! POOM! POOM!

OF COURSE.

POOM!

IT'S SO SIMPLE.

SPAWN SUMMONS HIS HELL-BORN POWER...

CREEPS!

...OR MAYBE HE JUST SHOWS THE ENEMY THE PUTRID CONTENTS OF HIS OWN SOUL.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE-- THE FIRST STEP IN CREATING THE SITUATION...

THE BATTLE WILL BE FOUGHT HERE. THE WAR WILL END HERE. ALL CREEPS WILL DIE.

GOLLY, JAMES. THIS IS REALLY SCARY. I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD GET OUT OF HERE. TELL THE GUYS.

I'm SO UPSET!

HERE I Am STILL UPSET OVER BUFFY AND NOW THIS! It ISN'T FAIR. IT ISN'T FAIR AT ALL.

AND SOON.

AT THE NERD CAMP.

THE WAR WILL END. THE ALLEY WILL BE YOUR GRAVE. ALL NERDS WILL DIE. TONIGHT. AT MIDNIGHT. FACE US NOW-- OR COWER AND CRINGE--

--UNTIL WE HUNT YOU DOWN!

CREEPS KILL NERDS! THIS MEANS WAR!!

HOLOGRAM. GOT TO BE A HOLOGRAM. COOL.

WAR. THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT IT MEANS.

THE SITUATION IS CREATED.

AND VERY SOON.

YEAARRGH!

BOOM!

BRAAKKA-JERAKKA

KUNK KUNK KUNK KUNK!

DIE!

ZHOOOOOOOOOM!

KOOGH!

BRAKKA-BRAKKA

KILL!

BOOM-BRÁK BOOM!

SPLUT!

KUNK KUNK KUNK!

BOOM!

TUNCH! TUNCH!

BRAKKA

HAH!

CREEPS KILL NERDS! NERDS KILL CREEPS! ALL CREEPS DIE! ALL NERDS DIE! ONLY BYRON™ STILL LIVES!

BYRON...

BYRON™ RULES THE ALLEY! BYRON™ OWNS THE ALLEY!

...LET'S PLAY "ALIEN".

Huh?

TELEPORTATION. IT'S THE WORST.

BEING RIPPED TO ATOMS-- SCRAMBLED INTO A LIVING STREAM OF ENERGY.

MIGHT AS WELL NOSE DIVE INTO A MEAT GRINDER.

HURK

WHY'D HE SAY THAT? WHERE'D HE GO?

I DON'T KNOW. HE'S A PRETTY STRANGE GUY.

THE ARMOR'S TOUGH.

BUT IT'S THE ONLY WAY.

IT'S THE **ARMOR** THAT'S THE PROBLEM. FIVE-LAYER **KEVLAR** WITH A SPLASH OF AN ALMOST NUKE-PROOF PROTON-HEAVY ALLOY.

BUT IT'S LIKE THE ESCAPE ARTIST HOUDINI SAID ABOUT A BANK VAULT HE LOCKED HIMSELF INTO.

--NOT TO KEEP PEOPLE IN.

GAGG!

GLURK

IT'S NOT FUN, AND IT'S NOT PRETTY--

IT'S BUILT TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT--

--BUT IT WORKS.

I'M NOT ASKING THIS TIME, AL. I'M NOT BUGGING YOU WITH A BUNCH OF STUPID QUESTIONS ABOUT STUFF THAT DON'T CONCEKN ME. SOMETIMES A GUY'S JUST GOT TO REALIZE THERE'S THINGS THAT ARE SIMPLY BEYOND A GUY'S UNDERSTANDING. SO I'M NOT ASKING ABOUT HOW IT IS YOU POPPED INTO THAT GUY'S CHEST AND CAME BACK OUT.

BUT WHAT I AM ASKING IS WHAT ABOUT *US*? WHAT ABOUT THE *ALLEY*?

WE LET THE COPS CLEAN IT UP. THEN, YOU KNOW, WE MOVE BACK IN--

--AND LIFE GOES ON.

NEXT- *Who killed* SPAWN?

MORE APPROPRIATELY, HELLSPAWN. THE OFFICERS-IN-TRAINING OF THE MALEBOLGIA, SENT TO THE LIVING WORLD TO HONE THEIR POTENT, YET LIMITED, SUPPLY OF POWER. THEY MUST FIRST PROVE WORTHY OF THEIR RARE SELECTION AS A WARRIOR FROM THE REALMS BEYOND.

THE LATEST RECRUIT, AND THE FIRST THIS CENTURY, IS LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS. MILLIONS OF SOULS, BOTH GOOD AND EVIL, WERE BYPASSED BEFORE SIMMONS WAS APPOINTED. HE HAD THE GIFT. THE RIGHT WIRING. THE WELL-TOOLED MACHINERY. DURING HIS FIRST EXISTENCE ON EARTH, HE HAD SHOWN A WILLINGNESS TO FOLLOW ORDERS. TO KILL. TO MURDER. TO SLAUGHTER. ALL IN THE NAME OF DUTY. HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IN THE GREAT BEYOND, BUT HIS ATHEISTIC LEANINGS ONLY MADE HELL'S SELECTION OF HIM EVEN MORE SATISFYING.

YET THE UNBELIEVER CANNOT BE CHOSEN AGAINST HIS WILL. HE OR SHE MUST OPEN THE DOOR TO EVIL WILLINGLY AND WITHOUT HESITATION. THE SURREAL TRAUMA OF DEATH EXPERIENCED BY EACH SOUL LEAVES MANY OPEN TO EXPLOITATION. THE EVIL ONE QUICKLY FOUND THE **CHINK** IN SIMMONS' EMOTIONAL ARMOR:

LOVE.

NOT FOR DUTY OR COUNTRY, BUT FOR SOMEONE. THIS WEAKNESS HAS BEEN THE GREATEST OF ALL AIDS TO ENLISTMENT FOR THE MALEBOLGIA'S ARMY. EASILY-MANIPULATED NEWLY-ARRIVED SOULS WILL BARTER NEARLY ANYTHING FOR LOVE. THEY WILL PROMISE, AND EVIL WILL ACCEPT. THUS, THEIR FATE IS SEALED. THE PACT WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR ETERNITY.

THIS IRONY-- LOVE AS EVIL'S TRUMP CARD-- IS NOT HIDDEN FROM GOD. SOME DAY, THESE TWO POWERS WILL CLASH OVER THIS COSMIC "HOLY GRAIL"-- ARMAGEDDON WILL BE FOUGHT FOR THE REASON HUMANS EXIST IN THE FIRST PLACE...

LOVE.

AL SIMMONS TRADED HIS SOUL FOR IT.

EVENTUALLY, THIS NEW SPAWN WILL HAVE ALL HIS ANSWERS. UNTIL THAT DAY, HE CAN ONLY CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE FOR SOME SENSE OF ORDER AND MEANING TO HIS EXISTENCE.

HIS MEMORY HAS ALREADY ACCESSED SOME VITAL CLUES, BUT OTHERS ARE BURIED DEEPER IN HIS SUB-CONSCIOUS, AND EMERGE ONLY SPORADICALLY.

OF THESE BRIEF VISIONS, HOW MANY ARE TO BE BELIEVED? HOW MANY HAVE BEEN CHANGED?

AT LEAST HE ACCEPTS THE NOTION THAT HIS LIFE IS COMPLETELY OUT OF CONTROL. THE FIGHT WITH **ANGELA, THE ANGEL WARRIOR,** SENT HIM TO PURGATORY, TEMPORARILY DISCONNECTING HIS POWERS. WHEN ALL SEEMED LOST, HE BLINKED, ONLY TO FIND HIMSELF BACK ON EARTH AGAIN, AMONG HIS NEW-FOUND FRIENDS:

NEW YORK'S HOMELESS.

HIS POWERS OBVIOUSLY INCLUDE TRANSMUTATION AND REALITY-ADJUSTING...

...UNFORTUNATELY, NEITHER IS AT HIS DISCRETION.

NOR IS THE LURE OF THIS CHURCH. NOW, FOR THE **THIRD** TIME, HE HAS HEEDED ITS CALL, NOT KNOWING WHETHER SOME DIVINE SPIRIT IS TRYING TO HELP OR HAUNT HIM.

HIS STILL-HUMAN THOUGHT PROCESS ALLOWS HIM TO MAKE ONLY THE OBVIOUS PERSONAL CONNECTION...

MY WEDDING.

IT WAS THE ONLY TIME I ENTERED A CHURCH. BUT WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH ANYTHING? MAYBE SOMETHING... MAYBE.

BESIDES, RECALLING SOME HAPPINESS MAY BE THE ONLY WAY I STAY SANE.

DO YOU, WANDA CATHERINE BLAKE, TAKE THIS MAN...

THE CEREMONY WAS ENJOYABLE, I HEARD. MY ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED SOLELY ON WANDA. FROM THE MOMENT SHE WALKED DOWN THE AISLE UNTIL WE LEFT THE CHURCH AS HUSBAND AND WIFE, I ALMOST FORGOT HOW TO SAY "I DO." I WAS SO MESMERIZED BY HER. NOT NERVOUS. I WAS NEVER NERVOUS... JUST TOTALLY CAPTIVATED BY HER BEAUTY, AND WHAT THE DAY MEANT FOR US.

OUR LIVES. THE FUTURE. EVERYTHING SEEMED SO PERFECT THAT DAY.

ESPECIALLY HER.

I'LL NEVER FORGET HOW INCREDIBLE SHE LOOKED.

HOW HAPPY SHE WAS.

... HOW HAPPY I WAS. WHEN WE DANCED TO OUR SONG, "ENDLESS LOVE," I WAS COMPLETELY UNAWARE OF EVERYTHING BUT HER. I REMEMBER WANDA LOOKING AT ME, FOR JUST A MOMENT, WITH TEARS IN HER EYES.

IT GAVE ME THE WARMEST FEELING OF MY LIFE.

AND WHO COULD FORGET LITTLE **GRANDMA BLAKE**. HER BLINDNESS NEVER SLOWED THAT WOMAN DOWN FOR A SECOND. FIESTY, JUST LIKE HER GRAND-DAUGHTER.

PLEASE, AL. I DON'T MEAN TO PRY, BUT WHY DON'T YOU *MAKE* WANDA TAKE YOUR LAST NAME. SHE WON'T LISTEN TO ME. CURSE HER STUBBORNESS.

DOESN'T SHE LOVE YOU? ISN'T SHE PROUD OF YOUR NAME? WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOM AND DAD...?

THEY MUST BE HURT.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE **FIFTIETH** TIME WE'D HAD THIS DISCUSSION. I TOLD HER THE SAME THING I DID THE **OTHER** FORTY-NINE TIMES. "I **MET** A WANDA BLAKE. I FELL IN **LOVE** WITH A WANDA BLAKE. I'VE BEEN **DATING** A WANDA BLAKE AND NOW I WAS **MARRIED** TO A WANDA BLAKE. WANDA SIMMONS SOUNDS LIKE MY SISTER."

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *CHILDREN*? WHAT ARE *THEY* GONNA BE? *SIMMONS*? *BLAKE*? ONE OF THEM SILLY *HYPHENATED* NAMES?

PLEASE, THINK ABOUT THE *CHILDREN*.

CHILDREN. FUNNY HOW THAT POINT BECAME **MOOT**.

I WASN'T ABLE TO GIVE WANDA THE KIDS SHE WANTED SO DESPERATELY.

DON'T WORRY. WE'VE FIGURED IT ALL OUT. INSTEAD OF "BLAKE-SIMMONS," WE'RE GOING TO SHORTEN IT TO B.S.

BIG B.S.! AND *LITTLE B.S.!*

WE'RE PLANNING ON HAVING ONLY TWO.

I DON'T THINK SHE WAS AMUSED. THE DOCTORS SAID IT WASN'T ME WHO WAS STERILE. NOW I KNOW THEY WERE **WRONG**. TERRY-- DAMN HIM-- HE GAVE HER A CHILD.

MY BEST MAN. MY BEST FRIEND! HOW COULD HE MARRY HER?!

HOW COULD HE DO THAT TO ME?! HIM AND WANDA! AT NIGHT! **IN THEIR BEDROOM!!** I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT. I FEEL LIKE I'M BEING CHEATED ON.

DRIVING MYSELF **CRAZY**. NEED TO GET A GRIP.

I KNOW. IT'S NOT HIS FAULT. IT'S NO ONE'S FAULT. BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE IT FEEL ANY BETTER.

I NEED **HELP**. I THINK I KNOW WHERE TO GET SOME.

WASHINGTON, D.C. THE OFFICE OF JASON WYNN, C.I.A.

OUR INVESTIGATION SHOWED THAT ONLY A *HANDFUL* OF PERSONNEL EVEN HAD ACCESS TO THOSE FILES, SIR.

COMBINED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR ARMORY HARDWARE PLACEMENT, WE'VE NARROWED OUR LIST DOWN TO THREE POSSIBILITIES.

WHO'S THE TOP SUSPECT AT THE MOMENT?

YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE THIS, SIR.

FITZGERALD. *TERRY FITZGERALD.*

DAMN.

I HAD SUCH HIGH HOPES FOR THE YOUNG MAN. WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT.

CONTINUE.

OUR DATA SHOWS THAT HE IS HEAVILY LINKED WITH ALL FACETS OF HIGH-PRIORITY GOVERNMENTAL PROJECTS, AS WELL AS CONSTANT INTERACTION WITH C.I.A. AND PRESIDENTIAL FILES. TO THIS POINT HE HAS KEPT A CLEAN RECORD AND HAS BEEN COMPLETELY OPEN TO ANY SECURITY CHECKS.

WHAT'S HIS MOTIVE?

REVENGE.

AS I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE, FITZGERALD WAS BEST FRIENDS WITH *LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS*, ONE OF YOUR *FORMER* AGENTS. IT'S OUR BELIEF THAT HE IS TRYING TO GATHER INFORMATION THAT MIGHT BE USEFUL IN A *BLACKMAIL* SITUATION.

YOU REMEMBER SIMMONS, DON'T YOU, SIR?

Ah, YES.

SIMMONS.

NOW THERE WAS A *MAJOR* DISAPPOINT-MENT.

SHAME ABOUT HIS DEATH.

THAT'S THE POINT, SIR.

AT FIRST, FITZGERALD, ALONG WITH SIMMONS' WIDOW, BLAMED THE AGENCY FOR HIS DEATH. HE QUICKLY CAME TO REALIZE HIS MISTAKE AND MADE FORMAL APOLOGIES TO THE APPRO-PRIATE OFFICES. HE HAS SINCE *MARRIED* SIMMONS' WIDOW, WANDA BLAKE.

WITH HER PARANOIA A CONSTANT THORN IN HIS SIDE, IT WOULD BE QUITE REASONABLE TO ASSUME THE TWO OF THEM HAVE DECIDED TO FOCUS THEIR ANGUISH IN A HOSTILE FASHION.

I SEE.

I WANT YOU TO CONTACT A COUPLE OF AGENTS IN NEW YORK. HAVE THEM GET ACROSS TO HIM A SENSE OF OUR SUSPICIONS. THEN FOLLOW HIS EVERY MOVE.

IT'S ALWAYS AMUSING TO SEE WHICH DIRECTION A SCUTTLING WEASEL WILL RUN.

THERE SHE IS, SITTING ON THE FRONT PORCH. JUST LIKE SHE ALWAYS DID. NICE TO SEE SOME THINGS HAVEN'T CHANGED.

HELLO?

WHO'S THERE?

SUCH A SIMPLE QUESTION.

GRANNIE.

GRANNIE BLAKE. IT'S ME... IT'S...

God have mercy Al?!

IS IT REALLY YOU?!

PLEASE DON'T GET UP, GRANNIE.

MY DEAR... AL... HOW CAN THIS BE?! I-I'M GETTING SCARED.

PLEASE DON'T BE.

I WON'T BE LONG. I JUST CAME TO TELL YOU THAT YOU WERE RIGHT. THERE IS AN AFTERLIFE. I'M SORRY I DIDN'T BELIEVE YOU.

I-I'M SORRY I DIDN'T HEED YOUR WARNINGS.

I'VE BEEN SENT TO TELL YOU THAT THERE'S A PLACE IN HEAVEN WAITING FOR YOU WHEN YOUR DAY COMES. THE HEAVENS WILL TRUMPET YOUR ARRIVAL.

BLESS YOU, CHILD.

I LOOK FORWARD TO JOINING YOU AND MY OTHER FRIENDS SOMEDAY.

GRANNIE-- I... I WON'T BE THERE WITH YOU.

HEAVEN IS FOR THE GREAT SPIRITS OF THE WORLD. THOSE WHO CARE. THOSE WHO OVERCOME GREAT HARDSHIPS. I CREATED STRIFE, NOT LOVE. WHEN OTHERS HELD OUT THEIR HANDS TO ME, I WALKED AWAY. GOD WELCOMES BELIEVERS, NOT DOUBTERS... PEOPLE WHOSE SPIRITS ARE FILLED WITH GOODNESS AND COMPASSION.

PEOPLE LIKE YOU.

NOW YOU LISTEN HERE, BOY. YOU WAS A *HERO*. YOU UNDERSTAND? EVERYONE ALWAYS TOLD ME SO. DON'T KNOW *WHY* YOU'RE SO CONFUSED, BUT GOD DIDN'T SEND YOU DOWN HERE JUST TO TELL ME I'M GOING TO HEAVEN.

HE MUST'A SENT YOU DOWN SO'S HE COULD PROVE TO YOU THAT YOU'RE A *REAL* ANGEL.

AIN'T *NO* WAY *SATAN* GONNA SEND ONE OF HIS JUST TO TELL FOLKS THEY'RE GOING TO HEAVEN. DON'T MAKE NO SENSE.

YOU HEAR ME?!

I LOVE YOU, AL. I MISS YOU SO MUCH. YOU MADE ME LAUGH LIKE NO ONE ELSE COULD. I MISS THAT. I MISS *YOU*.

AND *WANDA*. YOU'D BE SO PROUD OF HER. CARRYING ON WITH LIFE. GOT HERSELF A BEAUTIFUL GIRL. AND A *HUSBAND*.

DIDN'T TAKE *HIS* LAST NAME, EITHER.

THOUGH I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW *ALL* THIS, SITTING UP THERE WATCHING DOWN ON US ALL DAY.

GRANNIE ... I HAVE TO ASK YOU SOMETHING. DOES WANDA STILL THINK OF ME?

HEAVEN'S SAKE, CHILD!!

THAT WOMAN'S GOT MORE LOVE FOR YOU *TODAY* THAN SHE *EVER* HAD. SHE MISSES YOU MORE THAN *ANY* OF US.

I KNOW YOU'RE PAINED. BUT SOMEDAY, YOU AND WANDA WILL BE REUNITED FOREVER. WE *ALL* WILL.

YOU GAVE HER HAPPINESS, AL. AND *LOVE*. NO ONE CAN EVER TAKE THAT AWAY. SHE STILL VISITS ME EVERY TUESDAY. WHEN WE TALK ABOUT YOU, I CAN STILL HEAR THE *LOVE* IN HER VOICE.

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT. THANK YOU. THANK YOU SO MUCH, GRANNIE.

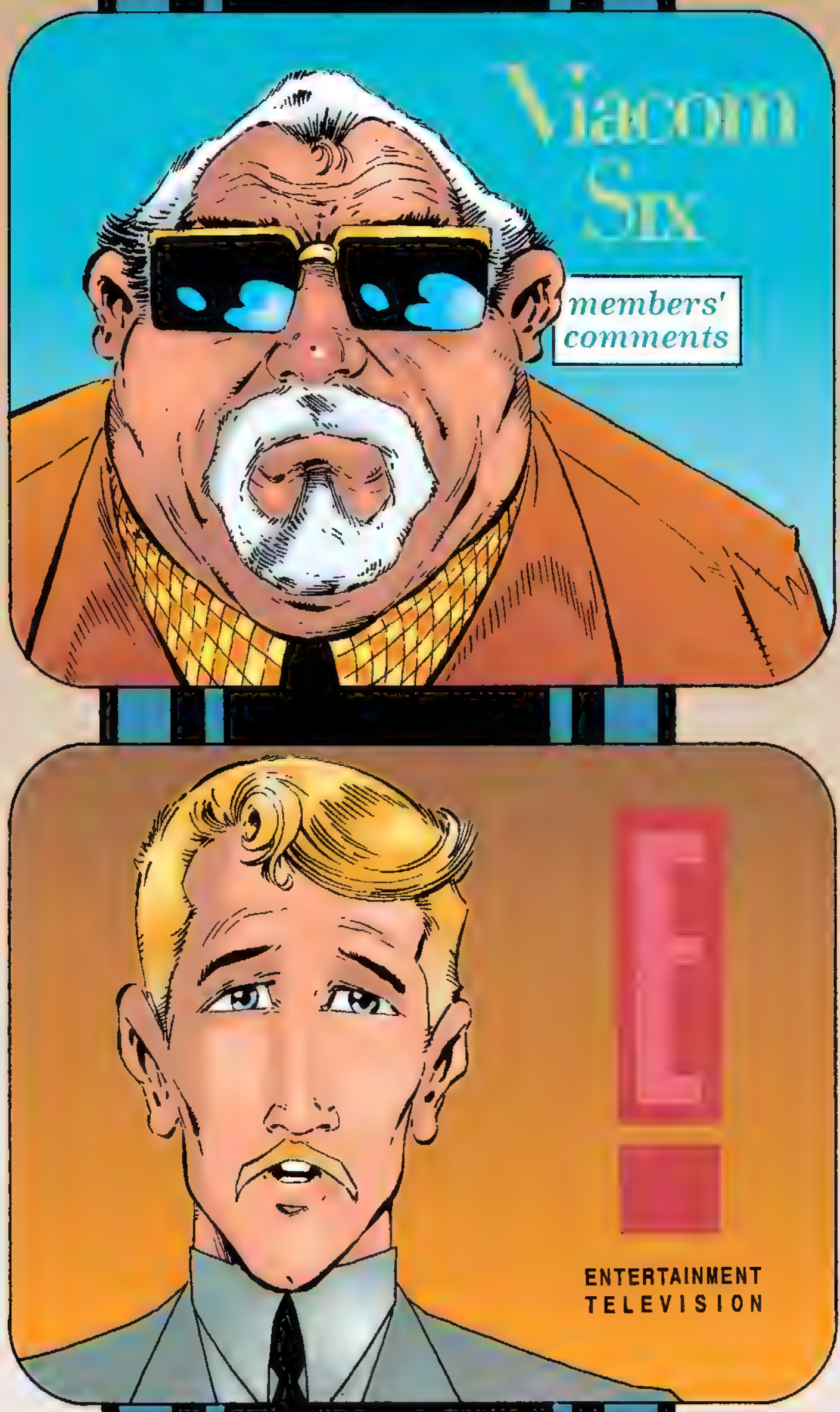
I HAVE TO GO NOW.

GOD BLESS YOU.

NEW YORK CITY OFFICIALS CONFIRMED THEIR INTENT TO BEEF UP POLICE PRESENCE IN MANHATTAN'S LOWER WEST IN RESPONSE TO THE SUDDEN RASH OF ***VIOLENCE*** IN THAT CITY'S BACK STREETS. BESIDES EARLIER REPORTS OF NONSANCTIONED ***YOUNGBLOOD*** ACTIVITY, THERE REMAINS THE QUESTION OF WHY SO MANY OF THE VICTIMS ARE SUSPECTED OF CONNECTIONS TO THE ***MAFIA***.

WITH THIS NEW DEVELOPMENT, IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO ORGANIZED CRIME WATCHERS THAT SICILIAN BODYGUARD ***OVERT-KILL*** WAS REPORTEDLY SEEN IN NEW YORK LAST WEEK. HOWEVER, OUR REPORTERS HAVE HAD NO LUCK IN DETERMINING HIS WHEREABOUTS.

ACCORDING TO SOURCES CLOSE TO THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, MANHATTAN IS FACING THE GRIM POSSIBILITY OF A ***WAR***, SEEMINGLY BETWEEN THOSE MAFIA GANGS AND THE MOBS OF DISENFRANCHISED YOUTH WHO PATTERN THEMSELVES AFTER THE GOVERNMENT'S ***YOUNGBLOOD*** PROGRAM.



SPINELESS WHELPS!!

THAT'S RIGHT, YOU PUNKS, ***YOU HEARD ME!*** IN MY DAY, WE DIDN'T RESORT TO SUCH ***COWARDLY*** STUNTS AS SHOOTING ONE ANOTHER! MIND YOU, I DON'T GIVE A ***HOOT*** IF YOU WANT TO LITTER THE ALLEYS WITH EACH OTHERS' ***INTESTINES!***

FACT ***IS***, THAT'D MAKE ME RATHER ***GIDDY***. WHAT GETS MY GOAT, THOUGH, IS THAT YOU HAVE TO SHOOT AT ***ALL***. YOU WANT TO EMULATE THE GOVERNMENT WHIZ KIDS, FINE! I THINK THAT'S ***MORONIC***, BUT WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM A BUNCH OF TEENAGE ***TECHNO-NERDS?!***

CERTAINLY ***NOT*** INTELLIGENCE.

WHEN ***I*** BELONGED TO GANGS, WE SETTLED THINGS WITH OUR ***FISTS!*** YOU COULD SEE THE ENEMY'S EYES. NOW ***YOU*** USE YOUNGBLOOD-TYPE MILITARY ***HARDWARE*** THAT CAN LEVEL A ***CITY BLOCK*** IN ONE SHOT.

OH YEAH, WHAT A BUNCHA ***FRIGGIN'*** HEROES!

IN A MAJOR COUP FOR ***PARAMOUNT***, STUDIO EXECUTIVES HAVE PURCHASED THE FILM RIGHTS TO MARK CURTIS' BEST-SELLER, "***COURAGEOUS AMBITIONS: THE AL SIMMONS STORY.***" THIS UNOFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY DELVES INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA TO SHOW US JUST HOW DEMANDING IT CAN BE, WORKING AS ONE OF THE PRESIDENT'S ***ERRAND BOYS***.

FOLLOWING THE HUGE SUCCESS OF CLINT EASTWOOD'S NEW FILM "*IN THE LINE OF FIRE,*" AS WELL AS PRIOR FASCINATION WITH COLONEL OLIVER NORTH AND GENERAL "STORMIN'" NORMAN SCHWARTZKOPF, IT LOOKS AS IF HOLLYWOOD IS DETERMINED TO RUN THIS NEW GENRE INTO THE GROUND.

THIS JUST IN...

WE'VE RECEIVED WORD THAT THE AGENCY HANDLING YOUNGBLOODS' VERY OWN ***BEDROCK*** HAS RUN INTO SOME LEGAL SNAGS WITH ANIMATORS ***HANNA-BARBARA*** OVER NAME-USE RIGHTS.

NEW YORK CITY. THE N.Y.P.D.'S TWELFTH PRECINCT.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!!

WHAT A LOAD OF CRAP!

JUST BECAUSE THEY FIND A *DEAD* GUY STRUNG UP IN OUR OFFICE WITH POPSICLE STICKS *RAMMED* THROUGH HIS BELLY...

...WE'RE PUT ON INTERNAL PROBA-TION.

ONLY UNTIL THE BOARD'S INQUIRY GIVES ITS RESULT.

SCREW THE BOARD.

AND SCREW CHIEF BANKS!

THAT *SON*OVABITCH HAS BEEN RIDING ME EVERY *DAY*. WHAT'S THE FRIGGIN' IDIOT THINK WE *DID*?!-- CARRY KINCAID'S BLOODY BODY UP THE *SIDE* OF THE *BUILDING*?!

YES, SIR. HE DOES.

LISTEN, TWITCH, WE *BOTH* KNOW THAT KINCAID DESERVED TO DIE.

HELL-- *EVERYONE* THOUGHT SO!

BUT THE MERE *FACT* THAT BANKS THINKS WE HAD ANYTHING AT *ALL* TO DO WITH THOSE POPSICLE STICKS POKING OUT OF HIM JUST INFURIATES ME TO NO END.

DON'T FORGET THE ICE CREAM SCOOP.

uh?

JEEZ, TWITCH! HOW CAN YOU JOKE AT A TIME LIKE THIS? *YOUR* ASS IS IN THE FIRE, TOO!

I REALIZE THAT, SIR.

BUT I TRY TO LOOK AT THE BRIGHT SIDE. SUCH AS-- THERE CAN BE NO POSSIBLE WAY THEY CAN FIND EITHER OF US EVEN REMOTELY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO BILLY KINCAID.*

PLUS, THE EVIDENCE WE FOUND IN THE HOUSE HE RENTED PROVES THAT THE COURTS MADE A MISTAKE LETTING HIM GO IN THE FIRST PLACE.

IT IS *THEY* WHO MUST ANSWER TO THAT LITTLE GIRL'S PARENTS, NOT US.

I KNOW I'VE DONE NOTHING WRONG.

THAT'S PEACE ENOUGH.

*ISSUE No. 5 --Tom.

IN THE MEANTIME, WE CAN ONLY WAIT FOR THE BOARD'S FINAL DECISION. NO SENSE GETTING IN A HUFF IN THE INTERIM.

BESIDES-- WHEN THEY *DO* CLEAR US, THERE IS THE SMALL MATTER OF THAT *CAPED STRANGER* WHO APPEARED AT KINCAID'S RESIDENCE.

THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT OUR LITTLE RED HERO YET. *HE'S* OUR ONLY LEAD IN THIS CASE.

AND I HEAR HE MIGHT HAVE SOME CONNEC-TION TO THOSE *ALLEYWAY* INCIDENTS.

AS FOR PUTTING ON A HAPPY FACE... ~~SORRY~~ I'M *NOT* AS PERFECT AS YOU.

BUT!

IF IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL HAPPIER, I'LL PUT ME ROSE COLORED GLASSES ON AND PRETEND LIKE ALL IS SO *VERY* VERY WONDERFUL!

THERE NOW. I FEEL SOOOOO MUCH BETTER!

ISN'T LIFE *GRAND!*

THAT IT IS, SIR.

I *ESPECIALLY* LIVE FOR THESE SARCASTIC MOOD SHIFTS OF YOURS. QUITE UPLIFTING.

AS THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT THE NEXT DAY, WANDA BLAKE AND HER DAUGHTER CYAN TAKE TIME TO ENJOY THE WARMTH.

DID YOU HAVE A FUN WALK, CYAN?

YOU MEAN YES! CAN YOU SAY YES?

NOPE!

CHESS!

THAT'S A GOOD GIRL.

MAMA'S GLAD WE WENT FOR A WALK. SO IS SHANNA. CAN YOU SAY SHANNA?

SHA-SHAW.

MAMA! MAMA!

YES, DEAR. WHAT IS IT?

JOOZE!

YOU WANT SOME JUICE?

NOPE.

YOU MEAN YES. HOW DO YOU ASK?

PEEZ!

THAT'S A GOOD GIRL.

COME SIT ON MAMA SO YOU DON'T SPILL ANY.

SHA-SHAW!

ARF!

RIGHT!

NO. SHANNA CAN'T HAVE ANY JUICE. WE'LL GET HER SOME WATER WHEN WE GET HOME.

HEY! WHO'S THAT!

hm?

GONNA GETCHA! GONNA GETCHA!

DADT!

GO GET HIM.

DADT! DADT! DADT!

CYAN! CYAN! CYAN!

HOW'S MY LITTLE GIRL TODAY? HAVE YOU BEEN GOOD FOR MOM?

NOPE.

IT'S FUNNY HOW SHE SAYS THAT INSTEAD OF "YES."

I KNOW THAT SHE MEANS YES, BUT IT MUST CONFUSE THE DAY CARE PEOPLE A BIT.

ANYWAY, HOW WAS WORK?

Oh, THE SAME.

STILL HAVEN'T MADE ME PRESIDENT, BUT I'M SURE THEY'LL GET AROUND TO IT. HOW WAS YOURS?

NOT BAD ACTUALLY. WE FINALLY SOLVED THE PROBLEM WITH OUR COMPUTERS, AND TOMORROW WE'RE...

DADT! DADT!

YES, CYAN.

HOME.

OKAY, SWEETIE, WE'RE ALMOST THERE.

POOH.

YES. YOU CAN WATCH YOUR WINNIE-THE-POOH TAPE.

LOOKS LIKE YOU HAVE COMPANY. I DON'T GET WHY YOU GUYS CAN'T LEAVE YOUR WORK AT THE OFFICE.

DON'T KEEP HIM *TOO* LONG, FELLAS.

YES, SWEETIE.

HERE, TERRY, I'LL TAKE HER. IT'S TIME FOR HER TO EAT, ANYWAYS.

MAMA HOME!

OH, OH! YOU'RE GONNA *FALL!* READY-- GO SEE YOUR MOM.

NOW, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU GUYS?

BEAUTIFUL FAMILY YOU HAVE THERE, MR. FITZ-GERALD.

SURE'D BE A SHAME IF SOME-THING WERE TO *HAPPEN* TO THEM.

REAL SHAME.

EXCELLENT! EXCELLENT!

FITZGERALD HAS BEEN PROPERLY ADVISED?!

YES, SIR.

WE'VE ALSO STARTED AROUND-THE-CLOCK SURVEILLANCE ON BOTH HE AND HIS WIFE.

PERFECT.

MIDNIGHT. THE BACK STREETS OF MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE.

FRIENDS SHARE THEIR BOTTLES AND STORIES WITH EACH OTHER.

THEY ALSO SHARE ANYTHING ELSE THEY MIGHT HAVE IN COMMON WITH ONE ANOTHER.

FLINTSTONES! MEET THE FLINTSTONES!

THEY'RE A MODERN STONE-AGE FA-MI-LY. FROM THE TOWN OF BEDROCK – THEY'RE A PAGE RIGHT OUT OF HIS-TO-RY. WHEN YOU- MEET THE FLINTSTONES – YOU'LL HAVE A YABBA-DABBA-DOO TIME! A DABBA-DOO TIME! YOU'LL HAVE A GAY OL' TIME!

WILMA!

glug- glug-

WHOA!!

TAKE IT *EASY* THERE, AL. SAVE SOME FOR *US*.

FLINTSTONES THEME SONG
© HANNA-BARBARA PRODUCTIONS

BOY, YOU'RE SURE IN A *FESTIVE* MOOD TONIGHT. WHAT HAPPENED?-- YA GET *LAID* LAST NIGHT?

HAR HAR burp HAR!

I JUST EXORCISED A FEW DEMONS.

NO BIG DEAL.

HEY FELLAS! LET'S SING THE *FRED* AND *BARNEY* SONG AGAIN.

GOSH, USED TO LOVE THAT LITTLE DINO.

SCREW DINO. HE'S A PUSSY!

BUT THE T-REX IN JURASSIC PARK-- KIDS TELL ME THAT'S A FOR-*REAL* DINOSAUR.

HEE-HEE-HEE HIC! HEE

I DON'T SEE WHAT THE BIG FUSS IS OVER THAT MOVIE--

--'SPECIALLY SINCE NONE OF US HAS SEEN IT.

BOYS!

LET ME TELL YOU WHAT'S AWESOME!! NOT SOME STUPID MOVIE ABOUT GIANT LIZARDS!

IT'S BOBBIE OVER HERE.

TO HECK WITH JURASSIC PARK.

HAVE YOU GUYS EVER SMELT HIS JURASSIC FARTS?!

SMELL LIKE THEY'RE SEVENTY MILLION YEARS OLD OR SOMETHING!

HONEST TO GOD.

HAW HAW HA HA HA snort HEE HEE HEE HO HO HA HA HA HEE

belch!

HAW HAW HA HA HA snort HEE HEE HEE HO HO HA HA HA HEE

Oh, MY. I THINK WE'RE GETTING TIRED.

HOW 'BOUT ONE GREAT STORY BEFORE WE CALL IT QUITS.

HEY GAREB! COME HERE AND TELL AL THAT STORY ABOUT YOU AND THE COPS FALLING INTO THE BIG WINDOW AT MACY'S!

YEA, YEA. LET ME FINISH MY WHIZ FIRST.

YOU'RE GONNA LOVE THIS, AL. GAREB TELLS THE BEST STORIES EVER.

OH! OH! MAYBE HE'LL TELL YA ABOUT HIS LAST CHICK, TOO!

tinkle tinkle

THERE!

THAT'S *MUCH* BETTER.

uh?

what's this?

BOOO

LOOK AT ME! I'M A *HERO* NOW!

I VANT TO **SUCK** YOUR BLOOD.

=burp=

SORRY, CHARLIE, I THINK I BARFED ON YOUR HEAD.

GET *OUTTA* HERE!

SO, AL, WHADDYA THINK?!

NOTHIN' TOUGH ABOUT *YOU* 'CEPT YOUR *LOOKS*.

FIGURE I GOT THE *FORTITUDE* TO BE A TOUGH GUY LIKE YOU?

HO HO. VERY FUNNY.

GAREB, **NO!** YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE PUT THAT--

UH?

ZIP

THE MASK MOVED ITSELF. HOW'D IT *DO* THAT?

YUURK!

AL! HELP HIM! HE CAN'T BREATHE!

THAT DAMN MASK'S TRYING TO SUFFOCATE HIM!

NII!

GURGT

GAREB. YOU OKAY?

huh- huh-- y - yeah... i think so.

I'M SORRY-- BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY CONTROL OVER THIS.

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE ME.

GASP!!!

I'LL BE O-OKAY. DON'T WORRY.

BUT I GOTTA TELL YA, NOT BEING A-ABLE TO-- BREATHE LIKE THAT-- WELL, IT WAS ALMOST AS BAD AS-- AS--

-- BEING AROUND ONE OF THEM *JURASSIC FARTS* OF BOBBIE'S.

HAR HAR! THAT GAREB! ALWAYS THE KIDDER!

I APPRECIATE YOUR HUMOR.

BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU-- THIS IS **NOT** FUNNY. NONE OF IT IS. I CAN'T CONTAIN THIS COSTUME'S MOVEMENTS. WHEN IT PERCEIVES AN ENEMY, IT MAKES ITS OWN CHOICES.

WHY'D IT ATTACK GAREB? CONSIDER HIM A HOSTILE?

DON'T ASK.

I HAVEN'T A GODDAMN CLUE HOW ANY OF THIS HAPPENS.

YET, FOR SOME REASON, I FEEL I NEED THIS OUTFIT.

SO JUST LEAVE IT ALONE.

THEN, SUDDENLY...

?

no.

AL'S MIND EXPLODES. HE BELIEVES IT'S THE ALCOHOL.

IT'S NOT.

THEN SUDDENLY, THE PICTURES BECOME CLEARER.

THE CLUES HAVE BEEN THERE ALL THE TIME.

HE HAD THOUGHT THE COFFIN WAS A REMINDER OF HIS DEATH. IN A WAY, IT **WAS**. BUT IT ALSO MEANT SO MUCH **MORE**.

THE FLAG!

THAT'S THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE.

AND THE **SKULL!**

IT SIGNIFIES **DEATH**. NOT THE GRIM REAPER, AS HIS INSTINCTS WERE TELLING HIM, BUT THE **FACE** OF HIS KILLER.

NEWLY-UNBLOCKED IMAGES COME POURING INTO HIS MEMORY'S·VOID.

HE SEES THE FACE OF DEATH SPRINGING FORTH LIKE AN EVIL **WEED**, TO CHOKE OFF THE THINGS AROUND IT.

THE FLAG DIDN'T SIGNIFY PATRIOTISM...

IT WAS THE KILLER'S **EMPLOYER**.

THEN... **SUDDENLY**, **FINALLY**... IT MAKES SENSE. **ALL** OF IT.

THE FACE OF DEATH WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A MASK. OR, MORE SPECIFICALLY... **MAKE-UP!**

AND THE FINAL PIECE IT NOW SEEMS SO OBVIOUS

"HOW COULD I HAVE BEEN SO BLIND THIS WHOLE TIME

"IT'S NOT MY WEDDING

—IT'S HIS NAME!

"DAMMIT! IT WASN'T CHURCH—

—IT WAS...

"IT WASN'T A CHURCH—

Nooooooooooooooo

CHAPEL

ISSUE 13

ANOTHER ONE.
THINK OF ANOTHER ONE.

Uh... YES. IT WAS THE SECOND GAME OF THE DOUBLEHEADER. WE'D LOST THE FIRST, BUT WERE TIED IN THE BOTTOM OF THE LAST INNING OF THE SECOND ONE. I'D REACHED FIRST ON A WALK, NEVER WAS MUCH OF A HITTER, THEN STOLE SECOND BASE EASILY. I COULDN'T HIT, BUT NO ONE EVER OUTRAN ME. STANDING ON SECOND, FEELING GOOD ABOUT BEING THE POTENTIAL WINNING RUN, I LOOKED OVER TO BEHIND THE THIRD BASE DUGOUT WHERE WANDA WAS SITTING. SHE SMILED AND STOOD UP SO I COULD SEE HER. THE NEXT BATTER SINGLED TO CENTER, AND I WAS OFF. UNFORTUNATELY, THEIR FIELDER HAD A ROCKET FOR AN ARM. THE BALL, THE CATCHER AND I ARRIVED AT HOME ALL AT THE SAME INSTANT. I WAS OUT, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. WHEN THE DUST FROM THE COLLISION HAD CLEARED, THEY HAD TO CARRY ME OFF THE FIELD. I HAD BROKEN MY ANKLE. DON'T EVEN REMEMBER IF WE HAD WON THAT GAME 'CAUSE THE BEST PART CAME AFTER.

7:9:2:6

ON THE WAY BACK FROM THE HOSPITAL, WANDA SAT CLOSE TO ME. SHE FELT SORRY FOR ME THAT I WOULDN'T GET TO PLAY BALL ANYMORE. ME, TOO, I GUESS. OTHER THAN FIGHT AND KILL, BASEBALL WAS THE ONLY OTHER THING I DID WELL.

BUT I STILL REMEMBER LIKE IT WAS YESTERDAY HOW WANDA CARED FOR AND PAMPERED ME SO I WOULDN'T BE IN PAIN. THAT NIGHT WE MADE LOVE 'TIL THE SUN STARTED COMING UP. MY FOOT STILL THROBBING, SHE MADE ME FORGET EVERYTHING. HER TOUCH EASED MY MIND AND DROVE ME CRAZY AT THE SAME TIME. AND THAT NIGHT, OUR LOVING EACH OTHER, IT WAS ALL SO PERFECT. SO VERY, VERY PERFECT.

PING

ALL THAT'S GONE NOW.

SO I HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING MYSELF OF WHAT HE STOLE. HAVE TO KEEP TELLING MYSELF THESE STORIES. OVER AND OVER. BUILD UP MY RAGE. MY HATE.

THE MORE ANGRY I AM, THE LESS I'LL NEED TO RELY ON MY POWERS. CAN'T AFFORD TO USE THEM UNLESS IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. I SOMEHOW SENSE THE DRAINAGE. HOW I'VE FOOLISHLY USED ABOUT TWENTY PERCENT ALREADY. IT'S CLEAR THAT I HAVE TO COUNT ON **MYSELF. NOT** THESE POWERS.

PING

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS WANDA!
I HAVE TO FOCUS ON THAT.

THE DEVIL TOLD ME THAT ONCE MY POWER IS EXHAUSTED I'LL BE BANISHED FROM EARTH FOREVER. I'D MUCH RATHER GET WANDA BACK, SOLVE MY PROBLEMS, AND NOT USE THESE POWERS AS A CRUTCH.

PING

Tek

Tek

IT'S ALMOST LIKE BEING HUMAN AGAIN.

Tek

PoK PoK PoK P

C'MON! C'MON! C'MON!

KILL 'EM! GET HIM! GET HIM! YEA!

PoK Po

SINCE I'M **NOT**, IT'S TIME TO NAIL THE SCUMBAG WHO HELPED ME INTO THIS BIZARRE SITUATION.

C'MON. C'MON. C'MON. C'MON. C'MON.

THIS SADISTIC GAME.

BZiNG

PING
POK POK POK
DING!
POK POK POK
AW COOL! NAILED HIM.
JUST GOTTA GET ONE MORE GUY AND I'M INTO LEVEL SIX.
THIS GAME'S RAD.

CHAPEL.

USED TO CALL HIM A FRIEND... ONCE. HAD A FEW LAUGHS TOGETHER.

THEN HE CHANGED. BECAME JUST LIKE ME. OR MAYBE I BECAME LIKE HIM. DOESN'T MATTER NOW.

I'D HEARD HE WAS BEING CONSIDERED AS A RECRUIT FOR THE YOUNGBLOOD PROGRAM. SEEMED LIKE THIS SENT HIM ON A GLORY STREAK TRYING TO PROVE HIS WORTH TO THE BRASS. ALWAYS READY FOR ACTION. ALWAYS READY TO KILL. JUST LIKE ME. FUNNY HOW HIRED ASSASSINS LIKE US COULD FIND DEATH TO BE THE COMMON LINK TO OUR ADMIRATION FOR EACH OTHER.

1345645324 9
LOT BETTER THAN THAT *SUCKY* SHAFT GAME. THAT WAS LIMP.
OUCH!
I'D NEVER LET *MY* NAME GO ON A BAD GAME.
HE MUST HAVE NEEDED THE CASH.
Pok-A-Pok Tok Tok Tok Tok

DEATH.

THE ONE THING WE COULD ALWAYS TALK ABOUT OVER A BEER.

AND WOMEN.

EVERY TIME I SAW HIM, HE HAD ONE OR TWO ALL OVER HIM. "THE DON JUAN OF KILLERS," I CALLED HIM. NEVER DATED ANY OF THEM, JUST GOT LAID THEN TOSSED THEM ASIDE. HE SAID RELATIONSHIPS WERE TOO MUCH TROUBLE.

C'MON C'MON
I BET I CAN GET A *BAZILLION* POINTS ON THIS ONE.
KILL 'EM! OVER THERE, NOW *KILL 'EM!*
BA BAP POK POK
KRAK
BAP!

HE EVEN OFFERED TO TAKE WANDA OFF MY HANDS ONCE A WEEK IF I GOT TIRED OF HER. THE PIG KNEW HOW MUCH I LOVED HER. DIDN'T SEEM TO MATTER, HE ACTUALLY THOUGHT HE'D BE DOING ME A FAVOR.

AW CRUD! NOT ANOTHER ONE?!

ESPECIALLY NOT NOW!

I JUST DON'T BELIEVE IT!

THIS IS THE HUNDREDTH ONE I'VE BROKE ALREADY.

CAN'T THEY GET IT RIGHT? I MEAN, *JEEZ*, THEY CAN PUT A MAN ON THE MOON, BUT THEY CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW TO BUILD A HAND-HELD TOUGH ENOUGH FOR ME.

PLUS, THEY *DOCK* ME EVERY TIME ONE BREAKS.

NICE *INCENTIVE* PROGRAM. AIN'T *MY* FAULT I GOT STUMPS FOR FINGERS.

THEY HAD A *HEART ATTACK* WHEN I ASKED FOR AN ARCADE GAME.

CHAPEL DID ME ONE FAVOR, THOUGH. DURING HIS REVIEW PERIOD BEFORE HIS INDUCTION INTO YOUNGBLOOD, HE BROUGHT ME TO WASHINGTON, D.C., TO SEE THE GROUP'S CENTRAL HEADQUARTERS.

THE YOUNGBLOOD PROGRAM HAD BEEN INTERESTED IN ME AS A CANDIDATE. I GUESS THEY WANTED TO SCHMOOZE ME A BIT. LUCKY FOR ME. I GOT TO LEARN THE BASIC LAYOUT OF THE JOINT. IT'S NOT CHANGED ALL THAT MUCH OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

THE PLACE IS STILL RIGGED WITH HEAT SENSORS. ANYTHING EVEN REMOTELY HUMAN CAN BE DETECTED. MY BODY DOESN'T TRIP THE ALARM, WHICH MEANS I'M NOT "REMOTELY HUMAN."

NO GREAT SURPRISE THERE.

BY HIDING IN A NEWLY-EMPTIED CANNISTER AMONG SUPPLIES BEING STORED, IT WAS AMAZINGLY EASY TO BE DELIVERED TO THE PROPER LEVEL. I'M LEFT TO WAIT FOR HIS RETURN.

DAYS. WEEKS. HE WOULD HAVE TO RETURN SOMETIME.

I WANTED TO BE THERE.

SO I SAT, AND AS EACH DAY PASSED, MY HATRED SOFTENED A BIT. I THEN BEGAN TO TELL MYSELF ABOUT WANDA, REMEMBERING THE GREAT TIMES WE HAD. THE SPECIAL MOMENTS. EACH THING I CAN RECALL ENHANCES THE MOOD.

MY ANGER GROWS AGAIN.

BUT WHY NOW?!

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF MY *BEST* GAME EVER!! IT COULDN'T HAVE BROKEN YESTERDAY WHEN I COULDN'T DO DICK!

Oh Noo, WOULDN'T WANT TO DO *THAT*, NOW *WOULD* WE?

BADROCK, BADROCK! ARE YOU THERE?

COME *IN*, BOY.

YA. YA. I'M HERE. WHAT'S UP?

WE'RE STILL HERE IN THE TRAINING ROOM. THOUGHT I'D CHECK ON YOU TO SEE HOW YOU WERE DOING.

...*AND* TO MAKE SURE YOU WEREN'T THINKING ABOUT USING THE SECURITY SCREEN AS A RECEIVER FOR YOUR VIDEO GAMES.

uh?

PART OF BEING A YOUNGBLOOD INVOLVES DISCERNING WHEN AND WHERE YOUR TIME IS APPROPRIATE FOR OUR NEEDS.

GET MY DRIFT?

*Uh. Y-yes sir. ABSOLUTELY. DON'T WORRY ABOUT **ME**, SIR. I HAVEN'T EVEN OPENED THAT **NEW** GAME THEY SENT OVER.*

GOOD. HOW'S EVERYTHING ELSE?

COULDN'T BE BETTER!

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME. I'VE GOT MY EYES PEELED.

SO DOES MY HATE.

YOU CAN HATE SOMEONE BUT NOT BE ANGRY AT THEM. AND YOU CAN BE ANGRY AT SOMEONE BUT NOT HATE THEM. IT TAKES A VERY EVIL PERSON TO MAKE YOU COMBINE THE TWO.

CHAPEL HAS BECOME THAT.

SO I WAITED SOME MORE.

FINALLY, HE SHOWED.

BY THE TIME I COULD MAKE A MOVE TO THE TRAINING ROOM, TWO OTHERS HAD JOINED HIM THERE. WHAT WAS HE TRAINING **FOR?** HE'D ALWAYS SAID, "PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT. BUT YOU NEED TO PRACTICE ON THINGS THAT ARE ALIVE."

I HOPE HIS TWO COMPANIONS ARE SMART ENOUGH NOT TO TURN THEIR BACKS ON HIM.

IF HE COULD KILL A FRIEND, EVERYTHING ELSE IS EASY.

AND ENJOYABLE.

IS THIS THE *BEST* TEST MATERIAL WE CAN FIND?!

I'M WASTING MY BLOODY *TIME!*

THEN WATCH *OUT*, TOUGH GUY...

...'CAUSE HERE COME THOSE NEW *WARRIOR DROIDS* YOU ORDERED FOR PRACTICE.

FINALLY... SOMETHING TO SINK MY TEETH INTO.

BADROCK, CAN YOU TELL RIPTIDE IT'S TIME TO RELIEVE YOU AT SECTOR ONE?

AYE AYE, CAPTAIN.

DON'T FORGET YOUR MEETING AT THREE.

HEY, GUYS!!

FORGOT TO MENTION ABOUT OUR MEETING WITH THE C.A.A. GROUP IN TWENTY MINUTES. TIME TO SHUT IT DOWN.

NOT ME!

YOU BABIES QUIT IF YOU WANT.

I'M JUST GETTING *WARMED UP.*

HIS LAUGH IS BARELY MUFFLED AS IT LEECHES THROUGH THE DOOR AND DOWN THE HALLWAY.

DAMN HIM. STILL AS COCKY AS EVER.

GOOD. DIDN'T WANT THIS TO BE TOO EASY.

'CAUSE WITH MY POWERS, I CAN'T LOSE. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN THE NEXT FEW HOURS, I'VE GOT THE WINNING HAND.

NOW THERE'S A CHANGE.

ONE FINAL REMINDER BEFORE I TAKE HIM OUT.

Wanda...

SLAM

THE DEAFENING SOUND OF STEEL RAMMING STEEL **STARTLES** THE THREE YOUNGBLOOD MEMBERS. AT THE DOOR, THEY SEE A FIGURE STANDING POISED FOR THE CHALLENGE. HE DOESN'T MOVE A MUSCLE AS HE CALMLY SCANS THE, CONSIDERING HOW TO USE IT ALL TO HIS ADVANTAGE. ALTHOUGH **HE** DOESN'T MOVE, HIS **CAPE AND CHAINS** SEEM TO FLIT ABOUT, SNAPPING LIKE CAGED **ANIMALS** GETTING READY TO FEAST.

HE SPOTS CHAPEL NO MORE THAN THIRTY FEET AWAY, AND HIS **HEART**, IF THAT'S TRULY WHAT IT IS, SKIPS A BEAT. AND YET, HE DOES NOT MOVE. HE HAS DECIDED THAT ANY ACTION WITH THESE YOUNGBLOOD MIGHT BE A DRAIN ON HIS POWERS. BESIDES, IT'S ONLY **ONE** OF THE THREE HE'S CONCERNED WITH.

THOUGH HE WISHES NOT TO WASTE ANY MORE OF HIS PRECIOUS NEW POWERS, HE KNOWS HE HAS **NO CHOICE.**

MAKE A ***MOVE***, MISTER, AND I'LL HAVE TWENTY AGENTS ON YOUR BACK. DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT IN, BUT YOU'RE ***NOT*** GOING TO WALK OUT.

TEAM LEADER **SHAFT** COMMANDS THE RESPECT OF THOSE HE LEADS **AND** THOSE HE FIGHTS. NO SUCH LUCK WITH **THIS** DEAD SOLDIER.

MAKE YOUR MOVE.

EVERYONE FREEZES, BUT THE MOMENT IS BROKEN BY THE SUDDEN ENTRANCE OF ANOTHER.

YO DUDES, WHAT'S UP!?

SOMEONE TRIPPED THE SILENT ALARM!

SO, WHERE'S THE *ACTION?*

uh?

GREAT! ANOTHER MEMBER. YOU MUST BE FROM THE YOUNGBLOOD ACADEMY.

AWESOME *CAPE*, DUDE.

ENOUGH. IT'S TIME TO END THIS PHASE OF THINGS.

SPAWN LIFTS HIS HANDS AND GESTURES EVER SO SLOWLY. LIKE A MODERN-DAY DRACULA HE BEGINS TO MORPH IN SIZE AND SHAPE, SHRINKING AND TWISTING, RADIATING COLORS OF GREENISH HUES, UNTIL HE IS COMPLETELY GONE FROM SIGHT, SAVE FOR THE TWINKLING OF POWER RESIDUE.

THIS WAS A PRECALCULATED ENERGY DRAIN. THERE WAS NO OTHER CHOICE.

WOW!

THAT WAS COOL!

PARDON ME... FELLAS?

HE WASN'T THE ONLY ONE TO ZAP OUTTA HERE.

uh?

HE TOOK CHAPEL WITH HIM.

WHAT?!

OKAY, ***LISTEN UP! DIEHARD,*** YOU SWEEP THE COMPLEX FOR SIGNS OF OTHER SECURITY BREACHES. IF IT'S CLEAR, NOTIFY HEADQUARTERS I'VE JUST REASSIGNED OUR UNIT.

BEDROCK...

BADROCK.

WHATEVER!

CHECK THE DATABASES FOR ANYONE WITH POWERS SIMILAR TO OUR INTRUDERS'. THEN, ACCESS ALL DATA CONNECTED TO CURRENT ***SUPER-FREAK*** ACTIVITY!

RIGHT!

I'M ALSO GOING TO SEE IF I CAN GET A LOCK ON THE ***PERSONAL GUIDANCE SIGNAL*** HE CARRIES. SHOULD PINPOINT HIM WITHIN TEN MINUTES.

GOOD!

NOW, ALERT THE ***OTHER*** MEMBERS TO GET THEIR REARS ***DOWN*** HERE! ***PRONTO!***

WE'VE GOT A ***CODE ONE*** EVENT!

TIME TO SHOW THE BAD GUYS WHAT ***HAPPENS*** WHEN YOU TRY TO MESS WITH US.

"IF CHAPEL DOESN'T KILL HIM ***FIRST.***"

IT'S LATE FOR TERRY FITZGERALD AND WANDA BLAKE. MOST OF THEIR NEIGHBORS IN THE NEW YORK SUBURB OF QUEENS HAVE BEEN ASLEEP FOR HOURS, NESTLED IN WARM BEDS.

TERRY WISHES HE WAS DOING LIKEWISE.

AS AN AGENT OF THE UNITED STATES SECURITY GROUP (U.S.S.G.) HE'S ALWAYS FACED THE POSSIBILITY OF DANGER. TERRY DISTANCED HIMSELF FROM THAT SIDE OF THINGS YEARS AGO WHEN HE SHIFTED OVER TO ITS INTER-CULTURAL LIASON UNIT.

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO AL, HE NEEDED A BREAK FROM FRONT-LINE ACTIVITY.

HE THOUGHT HE'D FINALLY GOTTEN IT.

AS IT IS, HE STANDS, STARING OUT THE WINDOW, NERVOUSLY FIDGETING WITH THE CURTAIN STRING. THE CAUSE OF HIS RESTLESSNESS: A NONE-TOO-SUBTLE THREAT OF HARM TO HIS FAMILY... FROM HIS OWN AGENCY.

THIS MORNING'S THREAT* SAYS OTHERWISE. HE KNOWS THE SECURITY GROUP DOESN'T MUSCLE ITS OWN UNLESS THEY HAVE SOMETHING VERY SERIOUS.

FOR THE LIFE OF HIM, HE CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT THAT CAN BE. THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

*LAST ISSUE--Tom-

THAT THEY EVEN IMAGINE A PROBLEM IS DISASTER ENOUGH. NOW HE MUST TRY TO FIND SOME ANSWERS BEFORE THINGS GET REALLY UGLY.

FIND. DETERMINE. FORMULATE. SOLVE. THESE ARE THE FOUR BASIC POINTS OF HIS TRAINING. IT SEEMS THEY LEFT ONE OUT:

Terry, is something wrong?

PROTECT.

I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE HAVING SLEEPLESS NIGHTS THESE DAYS.

WANDA AND CYAN. YOUR WIFE AND CHILD.

ANY LOVING HUSBAND WOULD SHELTER THEM FROM HARM. TERRY IS NO DIFFERENT. UNFORTUNATELY, HE HAS NO TARGET TO DEFEND AGAINST. KNOWING THE PEOPLE HE WORKS WITH, IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO FIND ONE.

UNTIL HE CHOOSES A COURSE OF ACTION, HE CAN SAY NOTHING TO HER ABOUT HIS WORRIES. FOR HER PART, WANDA HAS LONG ACCEPTED THAT HIS JOB BRINGS WITH IT A CERTAIN DEGREE OF SECRECY.

IS IT SOMETHING YOU CAN TELL ME ABOUT?

NO.

NOT YET.

I'M GOING TO CHECK ON CYAN.

AS HE GAZES AT HIS DAUGHTER'S INNOCENT FACE, HE WONDERS HOW MUCH TIME IS LEFT BEFORE SHE LEARNS THE CRUELTY THAT PEOPLE DO TO EACH OTHER.

NEW YORK CITY'S POLICE DEPARTMENT, 12th PRECINCT...

...HOW COULD SUCH A THING *HAPPEN*?

POOR LITTLE FOO-FOO.

I MEAN, THE ABSOLUTE GALL OF THAT MAN. SINCE WHEN DID GOD DIE AND LEAVE HIM IN CHARGE?

SO. WHERE WAS I...

OH YES! AFTER MY HUSBAND LOCKED HIM IN HIS OWN GARAGE... accidentally, of course... WE NEVER *REALIZED* THAT THIS LUNATIC WOULD EVEN *THINK* OF USING HIS CHAINSAW AS A LETHAL WEAPON.

AFTER DESTROYING HIS *OWN* DOOR, THE BUGGER NEARLY KILLED MY HUBBY!

ARE YOU LISTENING, YOUNG MAN?

YES, MA'AM.

GOOD! FOR THAT SICK, *EVIL*, SPITEFUL MAN TO START SAWING UP MY *POOR* FOO-FOO'S *DOG HOUSE* WITHOUT CHECKING TO SEE IF SHE WAS *INSIDE*, WELL... =sniff=

I DON'T EVEN WANT TO *THINK* WHAT COULD'VE HAPPENED IF I DIDN'T *STOP* HIM. I MEAN, IT'S NOT *MY* FAULT HE FORCED ME TO GET SO ANGRY. BESIDES, I CAN'T BELIEVE A MAN WITH AN ASS AS *FAT* AS HIS WOULD HAVE EVEN *FELT* THAT BUTCHER KNIFE IN HIS REAR.

I *HARDLY* STABBED HIM, THE BIG BABY!

I *JUST* CAN'T *BELIEVE* HE CALLED THE COPS!

AIN'T *YOUR* PROBLEM MY HUBBY *TOTALLED* HIS NEW PORSCHE.

Accidentally, of course.

Um, EXCUSE ME, SIR. GOOD NEWS! THE BOARD WILL BE RELEASING ITS DECISIONS TOMORROW.

IF WE'RE ACQUITTED, WE CAN BE BACK ON THE STREETS BY THURSDAY. THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO KNOW.

THANKS, *TWITCH*.

'CAUSE I'M GOING TO *FIND* OUR LITTLE RED HERO THAT DAY. LET HIM KNOW WHAT I'VE BEEN *GOING* THROUGH.

HE *OWES* US, TWITCH.

BIG TIME!

DETECTIVE SAM BURKE IS JUST FINISHING A MISERABLE DAY'S WORK FIELDING THE COMPLAINTS OF CONCERNED CITIZENS. SUCH IS THE FATE OF A POLICEMAN UNDER INTERNAL INVESTIGATION.

NEARLY EIGHT THOUSAND MILES FROM YOUNGBLOOD HEADQUARTERS LIES A CERTAIN SWAMP IN BOTSWANA. A GREEN MIST SWIRLS THERE, VISIBLY TAKING FORM...

...FORMS.

THE TWO HUMAN FORMS TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO RECOVER FROM THE SADISTIC EXPERIENCE OF TELEPORTATION.

PUKING HELPS.

WHERE THE *HELL* ARE WE NOW?!

SURELY YOU HAVEN'T **FORGOTTEN** THIS PLACE ALREADY?

WHA...?

BUDDY, I DON'T PAY ***ATTENTION*** TO THE LANDSCAPE WHEN I'M WORKING.

EXACTLY.

YOU NEVER GAVE A DAMN ABOUT ANYTHING THAT CROSSED YOUR PATH. EVEN YOUR SO-CALLED FRIENDS.

WHAT **HAPPENED**, CHAPEL? FIGURED I'D PASS YOU IN SERVICE RANKING? MAYBE IT WAS MY HAIRCUT OR CLOTHES. YOU NEVER DID NEED ANY **LOGICAL** REASON TO KILL SOMEONE.

YOU JUST WANTED A **TARGET**. FRIEND OR FOE, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

BUDDY, YOU DON'T KNOW A *THING* ABOUT ME. NOT A *GODDAMN* THING.

IF WE'RE HERE TO FIGHT THEN LET'S GET *ON* WITH IT. OTHERWISE, GET THE *HELL* OUT OF MY *WAY!*

ALWAYS THE TOUGH GUY, eh? I'D FORGOTTEN HOW DEEP YOUR **ARROGANCE** COULD BE.

EVERYTHING I AM, **YOU** GAVE TO ME, IN A ROUND-ABOUT WAY. THE DEVIL DIDN'T MAKE ME. **YOU** DID.

HE ONLY TOOK ADVANTAGE **AFTER** I WAS DEAD.

AS FOR FIGHTING, YOU'RE DAMN **RIGHT** WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT. AND BY THE WAY... YOUR **SIGNAL DEVICE**. I'VE **SCRAMBLED** THE SIGNAL. YOUR FRIENDS **WON'T** BE HELPING YOU TODAY.

SPAWN REMOVES HIS CAPE IN PREPARATION FOR BATTLE.

HE ISN'T DISAPPOINTED.

BUD, YOU'RE COMPLETELY *NUTS!!*

NUTS?!

SWAK!

KHN!

HAVEN'T YOU BEEN LISTENING?

YOU KILLED ME! STOLE EVERYTHING FROM ME AND YOU DON'T REMEMBER IT!!

WELL, LOOK AT WHAT YOU'VE MADE!

I THOUGHT WE WERE THE SAME, THAT WE LOVED OUR COUNTRY AND WOULD KILL FOR IT. BUT FRIENDS... YOU DON'T SLAUGHTER FRIENDS.

IT WAS THE ENEMY WE WERE AFTER THAT DAY.

GUESS I MADE A FATAL MISTAKE IN TRUSTING YOU.

YOU'RE A *CRAZY* ONE, THAT'S FOR SURE.

IT'S GOING TO BE A *PLEASURE* BREAKING YOUR SCRAWNY LITTLE NECK.

LET'S *END* THIS, *NOW!*

YOU HAVEN'T CHANGED IN ALL THESE YEARS. SO FULL OF YOURSELF. ALWAYS DID THINK YOU WERE THE BEST, EVEN WITH THE LADIES. ISN'T THAT RIGHT... DON JUAN OF KILLERS!

What did you call me?

dear lord...

AL?

CHAPEL'S MIND IS ELSEWHERE FOR AN INSTANT, FOCUSED ON EVENTS YEARS PAST:

YOUR BOSS, JASON WYNN, HAD JUST GIVEN YOU A NEW ASSIGNMENT, IN BOTSWANA. YOU WOULD MIX WITH THE U.S. UNITS, WAIT FOR THINGS TO HEAT UP... THEN KILL YOUR TARGET.

YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO...

...AL SIMMONS.

YES, HE WAS A FRIEND, BUT YOUR BRIEFING CALLED HIM A SPY FOR YOUR AGENCY'S ENEMIES, WHO'D BEEN FLAUNTING HIS PRESIDENTIAL STATUS AS A SMOKESCREEN.

DETAILS WERE GIVEN.

OF COURSE, YOU VERIFIED NOTHING.

SUCH IS THE MARK OF A GOOD SOLDIER: NEVER QUESTION AUTHORITY. JUST FOLLOW ORDERS.

WHO BETTER TO KILL A SECURITY PROBLEM THAN AN OBEDIENT PUPPET. FOR YOU, CHAPEL, GETTING THE JOB DONE WAS A SOURCE OF PRIDE.

THAT PRIDE WAS STRONGER THAN ANY RELATIONSHIP. YOU EVEN BOUGHT ALL OF SIMMONS' DRINKS THAT NIGHT.

WHEN THE TIME CAME, YOU CASUALLY LOADED YOUR LASER PACK...

...WALKED UP TO HIM...

...AND FRIED HIS BRAINS TO A CRISP.

A JOB WELL DONE.

NOW TO GET THE WORD OUT.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CONFIRMED TODAY THAT CASUALTIES IN THE U.S./BOTSWANA CONFLICT INCLUDE LT. COL. AL SIMMONS. HE WAS BEST KNOWN FOR THE COURAGE HE SHOWED WHILE THWARTING AN ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON THE FORMER PRESIDENT.

ALTHOUGH NO DETAILS WERE GIVEN, A STATEMENT READ BY THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY SAID THAT HE DIED "DEFENDING HIS NATION."

SIMMONS WAS AMONG THAT ELITE BRANCH WHOSE ACTIVITIES WERE COVERT BUT BROADLY DEFINED AS "UPHOLDING THE SECURITY AND INTERESTS OF THESE UNITED STATES." SERVICES WILL BE HELD LATER THIS WEEK AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETARY IN VIRGINIA. BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT ARE EXPECTED TO ATTEND, AS WELL AS OFFICERS FROM ALL BRANCHES OF THE ARMED SERVICES.

SIMMONS' WIDOW, WANDA BLAKE, IS IN SECLUSION AND UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT.

OKAY, LET'S SEE IF I GOT THIS STRAIGHT!

FORTY-THREE U.S. SOLDIERS HAVE BEEN KILLED SO FAR IN THE U.S./BOTSWANA CONFLICT, BUT THE GOVERNMENT SINGLES OUT *JUST ONE* OF THEM TO HOLD UP AS A GLOWING EXAMPLE OF TRUTH, JUSTICE AND THE AMERICAN WAY?!

WHAT ABOUT THE *OTHER* FORTY-TWO DEAD OFFICERS? IS ONLY *SIMMONS* TO BE GRANTED SAINTHOOD?

OR IS THERE SOMETHING *MORE* HERE?

CALL ME A CYNIC, BUT IS IT *JUST* COINCIDENCE THAT THE PRESIDENT IS PULLING AT OUR HEART-STRINGS AND VOWING TO BUILD U.S. ACTIVITY IN THIS WAR *JUST* AS THE POLLS SHOW HIS POPULARITY AT ROCK BOTTOM?

NICE *MOVE*, MR. PRESIDENT. *GREAT* TIMING. NOTHING LIKE A GOOD *WAR* AND A DEAD *HERO* TO HELP BOLSTER YOUR STANDING. THEN AGAIN, I COULD BE READING *TOO MUCH* INTO THIS.

TODAY, WE MARK THE PASSING OF A SOLDIER AS UNIQUELY SIGNIFICANT IN THE ARMED FORCES AS HE WAS IN THE *MEDIA*.

LT. COL. AL SIMMONS, WHO JUST TWO YEARS AGO WAS VOTED ONE OF OUR "TEN SEXIEST MEN" BY *PEOPLE* MAGAZINE, HAS BEEN LESS PROMINENT THIS PAST YEAR. THOUGH THIS CHARISMATIC GENTLEMAN FOUGHT FOR OUR SAFETY EVERY DAY, IT WAS HIS BRAVERY DURING THE HINCKLEY INCIDENT THAT MARKED HIM IN OUR MEMORIES.

UNCONFIRMED REPORTS SAY THAT SIMMONS WAS CAUGHT IN AN ENEMY GROUND SWEEP AND TRIED VALIANTLY TO DRAW FIRE AWAY FROM HIS FELLOW SOLDIERS.

IT IS SUCH ACTS OF COURAGE THAT MAKE US ALL PROUD OF THE WAR EFFORT IN BOTSWANA. *"LT. COL. SIMMONS, THOUGH VERY SPECIAL IN HIS OWN RIGHT, CONSIDERED HIMSELF AN EQUAL TO ANY AND ALL WHO WOULD PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY,"* SAID A PENTAGON SPOKESMAN.

YOU'RE NOT REAL!

YOU *CAN'T* BE!

WHAK

OOMPF!

IT MUST BE *GIGER* MESSIN' WITH ME AGAIN! -- ALWAYS THROWING SOME ILLUSION OR TRICK AT ME!

BUT TO USE *SIMMONS...!* THAT'S A *GOOD* ONE!

THAT TRAITOR'S *ALREADY* DIED ONCE, *LET* HIM ROT IN HELL!

YOU GOT YOUR *OWN* PROBLEMS TO WORRY ABOUT!

IT IS ME, CHAPEL! I'M DEAD ALRIGHT!

BUT NOT DEAD **ENOUGH** THAT I CAN'T TAKE A PUNK LIKE **YOU!**

MAYBE IT'S *YOU* AND MAYBE IT'S *NOT.*

NEVER COULD STOMACH YOUR *WHINING* ALL THE TIME...

...TRYING TO *FIX* EVERY-THING.

YOU ALWAYS *WERE* THE GOODIE-TWO-SHOES. THINK *YOU'RE* SCREWED?!

--THEN **DAMN** YOU!

IT WAS *ME* WHO TOOK THE SERUM, NOT *YOU!* *I'M* THE ONE POISONED WITH *H.I.V.!*

CHTCH

SO **SCREW** YOUR SOB STORY!

How pitiful you've become.

I DIDN'T TAKE THE SERUM BE-CAUSE WANDA AND I WERE TRYING TO *CONCEIVE.*

SO YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU WANT. I DON'T CARE. BUT IT IS ME...

...BACK FROM THE DEAD.

WITH MORE POWER THAN I NEED...

...BUT LITTLE ELSE.

YOU DON'T *SCARE* ME, SIMMONS! I KILLED YOU *ONCE*-- I CAN DO IT *AGAIN!*

WRONG!

I'M THE ONE HERE IN THE POSITION TO KILL.

YOU'D BE DEAD IF THAT'S WHAT I WANTED.

IT'S NOT.

YOU SEE, CHAPEL, WHEN I DIED, FRIENDS AND FAMILY MOURNED. MY DEATH CAUSED A LOT OF SADNESS.

AAAIEE!

BUT IF I KILLED YOU, NO ONE WOULD GIVE A CRAP. YOU DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS OR FAMILY WHO WOULD SHED A SINGLE TEAR.

ONLY THING YOU EVER CARED ABOUT WAS ONE-NIGHT STANDS...

... A BUNCH OF WHORES WHO DIDN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOU THE NEXT DAY.

THAT'S ALL YOU'VE GOT! ALL YOU'LL EVER HAVE!

WELL, I CAN FIX THAT.

YOU STOLE EVERYTHING I CHERISHED! EVERYTHING I LOVED!

TIME I EVENED THE SCORE!

AGGH

HERE'S YOUR TRACKING DEVICE. IT WORKS FINE NOW.

YOUR PALS SHOULD FIND YOU SOME-TIME.

I WANT TO SEE HOW TOUGH YOU REALLY ARE... IF YOU CAN KEEP THIS WAR ON A PERSONAL LEVEL?

EIGHT HOURS LATER...

CHAPEL! YOU OKAY?!

HEY, MAN, WHAT HAPPE— JEEZ!

BADROCK, GET THE FIRST AID-- NOW!

HE NEEDS HELP!

CHAPEL-- WHAT'S UP?!

WHERE'S THAT CAPED GUY?

HOW'D YOU GET HERE?

WHAT'D HE WANT? WHAT'D HE SAY?!

Nothing.

NEXT: THE *RETURN* OF THE
VIOLATOR!

HA!!

THAT'S THE BEST YOU CAN DO ?!

WELL, SIT BACK AND *I'LL* TELL *YOU* ABOUT "*TOUGH!*"

I USED TO WORK FOR A DUDE WHO WAS SO MEAN HE'D MAKE YOU PUKE! YOU KNOW THE KIND-- SO *SICK* THEY MAKE *YOU* SICK!

→Sigh.← WELL, THE DUDE COULDN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE, SO HE'D CALL FOR HELP ON THE REALLY *ROUGH* ASSIGNMENTS. ONLY THE *BAD*DEST, *MEAN*EST, *TOUGH*EST, *ROTTEN*EST EMPLOYEE WOULD GET THE CALL...

AND IT WAS *ALWAYS* THE *SAME GUY* WHO'D GET THE CALL...

A GUY WHO'D MAKE *SCHWARZENEGGER*, *STALLONE* AND *VAN DAMME* LOOK LIKE THE *THREE STOOGES*.

AND GUESS WHO THAT TOUGH-AS-NAILS WORKER WAS?!

I'LL HELP YOU OUT.

IT WAS I!... HUMBLE LITTLE OL' **VIOLATOR!**

GIMME A BREAK.

PLEASE...

...SAVE THE APPLAUSE TILL THE *END*.

FEED US ANOTHER LINE, YOU FAT LITTLE *LOSER!*

HA! HO!

SURELY YOU'RE PULLING MY LEG.

YOU WOULDN'T BE SO *INSOLENT* IF YOU KNEW OF THE LEGEND YOU NOW FACE. *I'M* PART OF *HISTORY*, KIDS. *THOUSANDS* OF TALES TELL OF MY PROWESS. *BUT!*...NONE HAVE GOTTEN IT QUITE RIGHT.

TONIGHT, I'LL GRACIOUSLY HONOR *YOU* WITH THE TRUTH!

LISTEN, OLD MAN, WE AIN'T GOT *TIME* FOR THIS KIND'A CRAP.

YOU TELL 'IM, CLINT.

WE WANT FAIRY TALES, WE'LL GO TO THE MOVIES.

THAT'S WHERE *REAL* MEN LIVE.

RIGHT, SPAZ?

I'M WITH YA, MARK. LET'S BLOW OUTTA HERE.

THIS DUDE'S WASTIN' MY *TIME*.

WHY, YOU LITTLE PUNKS!

NO TIME FOR ANYONE BUT YOUR-SELVES!

YOU KNOW, I SHOULD KILL THE WHOLE LOT OF YOU.

NOW NOW, BOYS.

I GAVE YOU THE COURTESY OF HEARING ABOUT YOUR HEROES.

BUT...

...I KINDA ADMIRE YOUR PUSSY ATTI-TUDE.

REMINDS ME OF MYSELF.

I ASK ONLY FOR A FEW MOMENTS OF YOUR TIME AS I TELL YOU ABOUT MY ADVENTURES.

SO I'LL BUY YA IF I HAFFTA.

EAT MY SHORTS!

C'MON, GUYS, LET'S GET OUTTA HERE.

WOW!

AWESOME!

IS THIS ALL?

SHUT UP, SPAZ.

OKAY, OLD MAN. WE'RE ALL EARS.

IS THIS COUNTERFEIT?

SILENCE!

MY TALE BEGINS.

OVER 800 YEARS AGO THERE LIVED AN EVIL WIZARD. HIS *SOUL* WAS AS DARK AS *COAL*. THE INHABITANTS OF THE SURROUNDING LANDS FEARED HIS VERY *PRESENCE*.

THE EVIL WIZARD HAD, AFTER ALL, *GUTTED* MANY INNOCENT FOLKS.

MEN. WOMEN. EVEN BABIES. *FEW* WERE IMMUNE TO HIS BARBARIC WAYS. PERMANENT STAINS OF *BLOOD* ETCHED ACROSS HIS BATTLE GEAR.

HE KEPT THE PEOPLE IN CHECK BY USING THE STRONGEST FORCE ON EARTH...

"MONEY!"

NO, BOY-- *FEAR*.

WHEREVER HE WENT, THE CITIZENS FLED. THOSE LEFT BEHIND COWERED IN HIS SHADOW.

THIS ISOLATION DROVE HIM MAD.

RIDING ON THE BACK OF HIS BLACK DEMONIC MONSTER, HE INSPIRED OFT-REPEATED STORIES. ONE TOLD OF MEN TRAMPLED, A HUNDRED AT A TIME, JUST SO HE COULD LAUGH AT THEIR BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAMS. CHAOS REIGNED SUPREME. IT WAS SAID THAT HE DERIVED GREAT PLEASURE AS WELL FROM WATCHING OTHERS DO BATTLE-- HIS TWISTED WAY OF UNWINDING. ONE SUCH INCIDENT BROUGHT THE REGION'S RULER OF THAT TIME, KING JOHN IV, INTO CONFLICT WITH A NEIGHBORING TERRITORY.

NO HARM SHALL COME TO THIS TOWN... NOT WHILE I LIVE!

WHILE THE TWO ARMIES STRUGGLED, THE DARK WIZARD STOOD IDLY BY, WATCHING GLEEFULLY AS THE RAPING AND PILLAGING OF EACH TOWN GREW MORE FRENZIED.

HE SEEMED TO TAKE PRIDE IN HIS APATHY.

THE PEOPLE GREW TO HATE HIM MORE AND MORE AS HE STOOD BY DOING NOTHING.

SO WHY DIDN'T SOMEBODY *ACE* HIM?

THAT'S EASY.

THEY WERE ALL *CHICKEN!*

NO ONE HAD THE ***GUTS*** TO STAND UP TO HIM.

WRONG!

MY BOSS HAND-PICKED **ME** TO GO TAKE HIM OUT.

I ACCEPTED MY ASSIGNMENT WITHOUT HESITATION.

THE PEOPLE OF THE VILLAGE WELCOMED ME INTO THEIR HOMES. THESE WILLING TOWNSFOLK ALL ***OPENED*** THEIR ***HEARTS*** TO ME.

THE NIGHT I ARRIVED WE ATE LIKE KINGS.

"***YOU'RE*** 800 YEARS OLD...?! Oh PLEASE SPARE ME!"

"QUIET, CLINT. I WANT TO ***HEAR*** THIS."

EVERY LAST ONE.

IT WAS A FEAST THE LIKES OF WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN.

THEIR HERO HAD ***FINALLY*** ARRIVED.

WORD OF MY PRESENCE SPREAD QUICKLY. I SOON VISITED THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES.

I WANTED TO ASSURE THEM ALL PERSONALLY THAT I WAS NOW THEIR SWORN PROTECTOR.

THEY NEEDED NO LONGER FEAR THE EVIL SPAWN-WIZARD.

NOT WHILE I WAS AROUND.

A FEW DAYS LATER, I HEARD OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN BEATEN BY THE WIZARD AND YET LIVED.

AFTER GATHERING THE INFORMATION I NEEDED, I MADE SURE THAT HIS WOUNDS WERE PROPERLY TAKEN CARE OF.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE KNEW WHERE THE WIZARD WAS HEADED. I DID NOT HESITATE TO VISIT THIS POOR, COURAGEOUS MAN.

ARMED WITH KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WHEREABOUTS, I CAREFULLY MAPPED OUT MY STRATEGIES ON HOW BEST TO ENCOUNTER THIS WICKED NEMESIS.

RUSHING INTO BATTLE WOULD ONLY WEAKEN MY POSITION.

I NEEDED TO STRENGTHEN MYSELF.

HONE MY ABILITIES.

EVERY VILLAGE MADE SURE I WOULD BE WELL-PROVIDED FOR. I HAD THEIR COMPLETE CO-OPERATION IN MY TASK OF FINALLY RIDDING THEIR LANDS OF THIS DARK HELLSPAWN.

THEY GAVE ME EVERYTHING I COULD POSSIBLY NEED.

FINALLY, I WAS READY.

ALL I NEEDED NOW WAS A *DECOY*... SOMEONE THAT EVEN THE MOST *DISGUSTING* OF HUMAN BEINGS ACTUALLY CARED FOR.

AND I FOUND HER.

...THE WIZARD'S VERY OWN EVIL, *UGLY*, ***WART***-FACED, WICKED **WITCH** MOTHER.

HOLD IT **RIGHT** THERE.

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. YOU'RE 800 YEARS OLD. YOU USED TO BE A ***LEAN-MEAN-FIGHTIN'-MACHINE***. AND YOU FOUGHT ***WIZARDS*** 'N' ***WITCHES***?

SO!

EXACTLY WHO IS THIS ***BOSS*** OF YOURS?! HE'S GOTTA BE PRETTY POWERFUL HIMSELF TO KEEP YOU ***ALIVE*** AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

SURELY YOU'VE ALL READ THE **BIBLE**.

WHOA!

YOU MEAN YOU'RE ONE OF GOD'S DISCIPLES?!

PLEASE!! GET WITH THE PROGRAM.

HERE'S A CLUE.

RECALL THE **OTHER** DIRECTION.

HELL I FEEL GOOD!

NEW YORK CITY'S POLICE DEPARTMENT, 12th PRECINCT...

...SPECIFICALLY, THE OFFICE OF DETECTIVES SAM BURKE AND "TWITCH" WILLIAMS.

I HOPE CHIEF BANKS IS DYING OF AN ULCER!

WE *SHOVED* IT RIGHT UP HIS REAR!

GOD BLESS AMERICA!

P-PLEASE, SIR--!

WATCH THE RIBS.

THEY'VE JUST GOTTEN WORD THAT THEY ARE OFFICIALLY CLEARED OF ANY WRONGDOING, FOLLOWING AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF CHILDKILLER **BILLY KINCAID.**

THE PAIR CAN NOW RESUME THEIR REGULAR DUTIES ON THE STREETS WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY. TWO WEEKS STRAPPED BEHIND A DESK DROVE SAM ALMOST COMPLETELY BONKERS.

hee-hee-hee!

I LOVE WINNING!

YES, SIR.

FIND OUR HERO IN THE RED CAPE.

BINGO!

WELL, TWITCH, YOU KNOW WHAT I'M GOING TO DO *FIRST*, uh?

THE INVESTIGATING BOARD DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIM. WITH US CLEARED, THEY'RE ANTSY TO FIND OUT WHAT *REALLY* HAPPENED.

MAYBE WE CAN HELP THEM OUT A BIT.

YES, SIR.

MAY I SUGGEST WE START IMMEDIATELY. I COULD USE A LITTLE OVERTIME.

BY THE WAY, SIR, YOU HAVE A DONUT SQUISHED TO YOUR ASS.

AS NIGHT FALLS UPON THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY, THE ALLEYWAYS ARE THE FIRST TO BE ENGULFED IN THE SILKY BLACKNESS. HERE IN THE GRUNGY BOWELS OF THE CITY, THE HOMELESS BEGIN THEIR TIMEWORN NIGHTLY RITUAL:

STAKING CLAIM.

THOUGH THEY OWN NOTHING, THESE DISENFRANCHISED OCCUPANTS OF THE BOWERY'S BYWAYS TAKE GREAT SATISFACTION IN SELECTING THEIR SLEEPING QUARTERS. SOME SPOTS ARE HAD BY LUCK, OTHERS BY TRADITION. THE **BEST** PLACES ARE USUALLY GAINED WITH BRIBES OF LIQUOR, OR THROUGH PHYSICAL CONFLICT.

WHATEVER THE CASE, THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW ACTIVITIES FOR WHICH THESE OUTCASTS FEEL ANY KIND OF PASSION.

THEY MAY HAVE LOST MANY THINGS IN THEIR LIVES, BUT **PRIDE** IS NOT AMONG THEM.

IN MORE RECENT TIMES, A **NEW** PLAYER HAS ENTERED THIS GAME.

HE HAS QUICKLY EARNED THE RESPECT AND LOYALTY OF THOSE HE LIVES WITH.

THOUGH IT TOOK HIM NEARLY EIGHT DAYS TO RETURN FROM AFRICA, HIS CHOICE OF RESTING PLACES IS UNDISPUTED. THE PECKING ORDER ENDURES.

SHELTERED AWAY IN HIS NEW RESTING SPOT, SPAWN CAN REFLECT CALMLY ON HIS ACTIONS, CONSIDERING WHAT WENT WRONG, AND WHY.

ANOTHER SLEEPLESS NIGHT. IT'S BECOMING PREDICTABLE.

HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID.

7:7:5:4

I'VE LET ANGER DICTATE MY ACTIONS.

CHAPEL NOW KNOWS I'M ALIVE. UP TILL NOW MY GREATEST ADVANTAGE WAS MY **DEATH**. NO MATTER WHAT I DID, I WAS CLEAN. NO ONE WOULD THINK THAT A DEAD MAN WAS RESPONSIBLE. THEY'VE BEEN CHASING SHADOWS AND RED HERRINGS.

BUT IF CHAPEL TALKS, I'M **SCREWED**. BIG TIME.

AT LEAST I'VE HAD MY REVENGE BY BRANDING HIS FACE WITH THAT STUPID SKULL MARK PERMANENTLY. EVEN MAKE-UP WON'T STICK TO IT. HE'S A WALKING HORROR SHOW.

GOOD. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE THE ONLY ONE.

WHAT NOW?

DO I SIT AROUND WAITING TO SEE IF HE OPENS HIS BIG MOUTH? FORGET IT. TIME'S STILL ON MY SIDE.

IT'D STILL TAKE A COUPLE OF MONTHS FOR ANYONE TO TRACK ME DOWN.

I'LL JUST HAVE TO CROSS THAT BRIDGE WHEN I GET TO IT.

TAKE THE NEXT LEFT, TWITCH. CONNORS SAID THERE'S USUALLY A HIGH DENSITY OF THEM DOWN THAT BACK WAY!

YES, SIR.

I'VE HEARD OUR CAPED VIGILANTE MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN OTHER SLAYINGS.

HOW DO WE KNOW HE'S NOT INVOLVED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S ***YOUNGBLOOD*** PROGRAM?

WE ***DON'T!***

BUT EVEN IF HE IS, THEY DON'T GIVE PRIVILEGES SUCH AS ***MANSLAUGHTER*** TO THEIR AGENTS.

WE'VE GOT OURSELVES A PURE AND SIMPLE ***WACKO.***

THAT I'LL AGREE WITH, SIR.

GOOD!

NOW LET'S GET GOING. CHANCES ARE, OUR LITTLE HERO'S SPLIT TOWN. IF HE WAS SMART, THAT IS.

BUT I'VE BEEN ONE TO GIVE CRIMINALS ABNORMALLY HIGH I.Q.'S!

WELL, LOOKY WHAT WE'VE GOT HERE. A REGULAR CONVENTION OR SOMETHING. TWITCH, THIS MIGHT JUST BE OUR ***LUCKY*** DAY.

IT'S NIGHT, SIR.

'EVENING, FELLOWS.

WHOOPEE! IT'S THE FUZZ.

"FUZZ"? SORRY TO BREAK IT TO YOU, BUT THAT TERM WENT OUT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO... THOUGH I DON'T SUPPOSE YOUR STEADY DIET OF ***DRUGS*** AND ***BOOZE*** HAS MADE YOU ANY KIND OF EINSTEIN.

PLEASE, SIR. LET'S BE PLEASANT ABOUT THIS.

YOU'RE RIGHT.

GENTLEMEN... MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION ***PLEASE!***

MY PARTNER AND I ARE LOOKING FOR A POSSIBLE NEW ACQUAINTANCE OF YOURS. HE WEARS A CAPE, WHICH IS RED. HE CAN SOMEHOW MAKE DEAD BODIES APPEAR IN MY OFFICE.

OTHER THAN THAT, I'M SURE HE'S *PERFECTLY* NORMAL.

RING ANY BELLS?

NOPE.

NOPE.

NOPE.

YOU'RE *NUTS*, COP.

LOST IN THOUGHT, AL TURNS THE CORNER OF THE LONG ALLEYWAY.

QUICKLY, HE SNAPS BACK TO REALITY...

... AND DECIDES TO WANDER AIMLESSLY ELSEWHERE.

NO SENSE IN A CONFRONTATION.

Huh?

WHAT THE *HELL?!*

TWITCH! DID YOU SEE *THAT?!*

Y-YOU KNOW, NOW THAT YOU ASK, I *DO* REMEMBER--uh--*SOME* GUY THAT--I THINK HE--

GET OUTTA MY **WAY,** *OLD MAN, BEFORE I RUN YOU* **OVER!**

SPAWN'S FRIENDS CREATE JUST ENOUGH OF A DISTRACTION TO HELP HIS ESCAPE.

DAMN! HE'S GONE!

"I SWEAR, THIS GUY LEADS A *CHARMED* LIFE."

AL SIMMONS WOULD CONSIDER THAT TO BE A VERY, VERY BAD JOKE.

SO ANYWAYS, IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO HUNT DOWN THE WICKED WITCH!

SHE WAS 100% EVIL.

THE VERY SIGHT OF HER WOULD MAKE YOU SCREAM. FANGS GREW FROM HER BLACK LIPS. PIERCING RED EYES SANK INTO A FACE SPLATTERED WITH WARTS AND CUTS.

HIDEOUS DOESN'T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE HER.

AND, SHE WAS POWERFUL BEYOND BELIEF.

SHE COULD CONTROL THE WIND AND THE RAIN. EVEN THE CREATURES OF THE FOREST LISTENED TO HER COMMANDS.

AND HOW SHE LOVED HER SON.

I'LL AWAIT YOUR RETURN, MY PRINCE.

I SHALL COME BACK IN HASTE.

KEEP THEE WELL DURING MY ABSENCE, SWEET DARLING.

IF I COULD ONLY FIND AND CAPTURE THIS COLD, SADISTIC WOMAN, I MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE OF KILLING THE SPAWN-WIZARD HIMSELF.

SHE WOULD BE MY DECOY.

IT TOOK THREE DAYS' TRAVEL TO REACH HER CASTLE. AT HER DOORWAY I FOUGHT TWENTY OR MORE MONSTERS WHICH BARRED MY PATH.

I WON, BUT JUST BARELY.

WHEN I REACHED THE WITCH'S CAVERN, I WAS MOMENTARILY OVERCOME BY HER MAGICAL POWERS. FORTUNATELY, SHE HAD WILLED A PORTION OF THEM TO HER SON.

EVEN IN MY WEAKENED STATE, I WAS STILL ABLE TO BEST HER AND ESCAPE WITH MY LIFE.

P-PLEASE...

GOD HAVE MERCY.

THIS LEGENDARY FIGHT HAS BEEN ACCLAIMED OVER THE GENERATIONS AS THE TURNING POINT IN MY CRUSADE TO KILL THE SPAWN-WIZARD.

IT TOOK DAYS, BUT FINALLY I DETERMINED THE WHEREABOUTS OF HER SON.

EVEN IN CAPTIVITY, SHE FOUGHT, NEVER GIVING UP. IN SOME TWISTED WAY, I ALMOST ADMIRED HER STAMINA. I HAD SEEN THOUSANDS OF MEN WHO FOUGHT LESS GALLANTLY.

WHEN AT LAST SHE SUCCUMBED, I TOOK HER WITH ME AS I SET OF AFTER HER SON.

THE TIME HAD COME TO FACE THE BLACK WIZARD.

A BRAVE MESSENGER DELIVERED A NOTE TO THE HELLSPAWN, TELLING OF HIS MOTHER'S CAPTURE. THE LETTER SPOKE OF A "CHALLENGE.

A FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

WINNER-TAKE-ALL.

THE SPAWN-WIZARD ACCEPTED, 'CAUSE, TO TELL THE TRUTH, HE WAS A BIG *MOMMA'S BOY*. HE COULDN'T STAND TO SEE HIS MOTHER IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

SO WE MET.

FACE TO FACE. MAN TO MAN.

WHAT TOOK PLACE THAT NIGHT IS THE REASON THE WORD "HEROIC" EXISTS IN THE DICTIONARY TODAY.

... HIDING BEHIND THIS WOMAN'S SKIRTS.

I SHALL KILL YOU!

HE TREMBLED AT MY VERY PRESENCE.

I TOLD HIM I WOULD NOT LEAVE BEFORE COLLECTING THE HEADS FROM HE AND HIS MOTHER, FOR MY TROPHY-CASE.

THIS, OBVIOUSLY, DIDN'T SIT VERY WELL WITH HIM.

HE TRIED TO REACH HIS MOTHER, BUT I BLOCKED THE WAY.

YOU... COWARD...

FACE ME WITH HONOR, YOU DEVIL'S TOY.

PRINCE! HELP ME!

I KNOW WHY YOU'VE BEEN SENT. YOUR MASTER WISHES TO TEST ME, TO SEE IF I AM FIT FOR HIS ARMY.

YOU TELL HIM I WILL **NOT** BE SCARED BY THE LIKES OF YOU!

WE ARE **BOTH** PAWNS IN HIS ETERNAL WAR WITH HEAVEN.

BUT I WILL **NOT** BE TOYED WITH.

SO BEGAN OUR HISTORIC BATTLE.

GOOD VERSUS EVIL. TO THE DEATH. HIS STRENGTH AND AGILITY SURPRISED ME AT FIRST, BUT I HAD TO REMAIN FOCUSED. ANY DISTRACTION COULD COST ME MY LIFE! I HAD TO FIGHT WITH ALL MY SENSES ACTING AS ONE.

OUR WAR RAGED ON FOR WHAT SEEMED LIKE AN ETERNITY. THE VERY GROUND SHOOK WITH OUR EVERY MOVE.

DO YOU EVER STOP?!

HOWEVER, I COULD DETECT EXHAUSTION CREEPING UNBIDDEN INTO THE SPAWN'S SWORD ARM.

HE BACKED ME UP AGAINST A TREE LINE, HOPING I WOULD TRY TO FLEE. THEN, WITH ALL THE DARKNESS THAT HID THE FOREST AS HIS EXCUSE, HE COULD SAY HE LOST ME IN THE SHADOWS.

OBVIOUSLY, HE GROSSLY UNDER-ESTIMATED MY GRIT AND DETERMINATION.

QUICKLY, I MADE MY MOVE.

THE FIERCENESS OF MY ATTACK CAUGHT HIM COMPLETELY OFF-GUARD.

I HAD HIM ON THE ROPES!!

AT ONE POINT I LOST TRACK OF HIM. HE HAD VANISHED INTO THE FOREST.

YOU ARE VERY GOOD, TRICKSTER.

NOW SHOW YOURSELF!

I TIRE OF THIS GAME.

WHEN I SAW THAT HIS WICKED MOTHER WAS TIED TO THE TREE, I KNEW HE'D HAVE TO RETURN.

STRIKE NOW, DEMON.

I TURNED AT THE SOUND OF HIS MUFFLED VOICE. HE STOOD BY A GREAT OAK, ALMOST DEFYING ME TO REACT.

WELL, I DIDN'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT THE LITTLE PUS-HEAD.

I SAID-- STEP INTO THE MOONLIGHT, YOU SPINELESS WHELP!!

SO I WAITED CALMLY.

BESIDES, HE HAD IT COMING.

MUSTERING ALL THE STRENGTH I HAD LEFT, I DIRECTED EVERYTHING INTO ONE LAST FIERY BLOW.

I BARFED A MAELSTROM OF ACIDIC FLAMES FULL FORCE INTO MY HATED ENEMY.

WITHOUT MOVING A MUSCLE, HE CAUGHT THE FULL ONSLAUGHT OF MY BLAST. AS I CONTINUED TO VOMIT DEATH, I COULD ONLY LAUGH INSIDE. THE WICKED WITCH WAS LEFT TO WATCH, HORRIFIED, AS I FRENCH FRIED OL' SONNY BOY.

MY PRINCE . . .

NOOOO!

TEN MINUTES AFTER I STOPPED, HIS ARMOR STILL GLOWED RED-HOT. WHEN IT COOLED, FINALLY, I CHECKED INSIDE... *AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT I FOUND?*

BEVIS AND BUTTHEAD!

HA-HA! GOOD ONE, MARK!

MAYBE IT WAS JUST A VERY TANNED WIZARD.

YEAH-- OR MAYBE A BIG PILE OF CRAP!

WHO CARES. C'MON, GUYS, LET'S GET OUTTA HERE.

BUT... BUT... BOYS--THIS IS THE CLIMAX!

I'M ALMOST DONE... JUST A FEW MORE MINUTES...

... oh, OKAY...

HERE'S ANOTHER FIVE BUCKS EACH. YOU HAPPY?!

BEAUTY!

ALRIGHT, WHAT DID YOU FIND?

DIDDLY!

HAHAHAHA

I HAD COMPLETELY *DISINTEGRATED* THE POOR SUCKER!

HA-HA-HA-HA!

NEXT ISSUE | THE CONCLUSION-- AND A NEW LEGEND IS BORN! (HONEST-- I WOULDN'T LIE.)

ISSUE 15

BANISHED BY THE DEVIL TO A LIFE ON EARTH IN HUMAN FORM, **THE VIOLATOR** IS AT A LOSS FOR WHAT TO DO NEXT. FACED WITH UNACCUSTOMED SILENCE FROM DOWN BELOW, HE'S BIDING HIS TIME UNTIL HE CAN FIGURE A WAY TO GET BACK HIS LOST POWERS.

NORMALLY A MISSHAPEN EMBODIMENT OF HORROR--WITH PROTRUDING HORNS AND TALONS--HE IS NOW STUCK IN A THREE-FOOT-TEN-INCH BODY, LOOKING LIKE A MINIATURE SUMO WRESTLER GONE TO SEED... **BAD** SEED. HE IS THE VICTIM OF HIS OWN FAILURE TO FULFILL HIS MASTER'S WISHES.*

ON HIS LAST MISSION, THE VIOLATOR'S ORDERS WERE TO PROVOKE THE NEWLY-ARRIVED **SPAWN** TO EXPERIMENT WITH ITS POWERS. INSTEAD OF STAGING A DIRECT ATTACK, THE VIOLATOR DECIDED TO DRAW THE SPAWN OUT BY GOING ON A KILLING SPREE. BY DISMEMBERING SOME OF NEW YORK'S **TOP MAFIA DONS**, THE VIOLATOR HOPED TO ATTRACT THE MOB AND THE POLICE INTO A TWO-PRONGED ATTACK AGAINST SPAWN, THE NEW, POWERFUL, COSTUMED PLAYER IN THE AREA.

INSTEAD, THE VIOLATOR ONLY COMPLICATED MATTERS. AFTER ALL, THERE WAS NOTHING TO LINK SPAWN WITH THE WEIRDLY BRUTAL KILLINGS. IN FACT, THAT SENSELESS ASSAULT CAUSED THE CRIME CARTEL TO BECOME CAUTIOUS FOR A WHILE. CRIME ACTUALLY WENT **DOWN** A FEW PERCENTAGE POINTS. FROM THE DEVIL'S POINT OF VIEW, THIS WAS **UNACCEPTABLE**. FOR HELL TO PROSPER, EVIL MUST GAIN NEW GROUND, AND THE VIOLATOR WAS TO BLAME FOR THIS SORRY STATE OF DECLINE. AS A PUNISHMENT, THE VIOLATOR HAS LOST ACCESS TO HIS MONSTROUS, MORE POWERFUL FORM.

OUR ROTUND VIOLATOR, THE WORLD-CLASS IDIOT, SIMPLY **DIDN'T GET IT**. FIGURING THAT HE'S MERELY BEEN **REPLACED** BY THE NEW HELLSPAWN, HE DECIDED TO TAKE A REASONED APPROACH AND BUILD SOME SUPPORT AT THE GRASS ROOTS. IF HE CAN IMPRESS THE YOUNG WITH HIS MAGNIFICENT SKILLS AND DEVIL-MAY-CARE PHILOSOPHY, HIS MASTER MAY LOOK KINDLY UPON THE EVENTUAL, DISEASED RESULTS OF HIS INFLUENCE.

CLINT, MARK AND **SPAZ**, THREE CITIZENS OF THE STREETS, HAVE BEEN DRAFTED AS OBSERVERS FOR HIS **ONE-MAN BATTLE OF WITS**.

HE'S BEEN TELLING THEM OF A CAMPAIGN AGAINST **ANOTHER** SPAWN, FOUGHT NEARLY **800 YEARS AGO**. THIS TALE, WE ARE QUICK TO POINT OUT, INVOLVES TWO VICTIMS: THE **SPAWN**, AND THE **FACTS**.

THE VIOLATOR CLEARS HIS THROAT, SPITS IMPRESSIVELY, AND CONTINUES...

*ISSUE N8 4 -- Tom

Ahhh...

SO NOW YOU'RE A *FIRE-BREATHER* AS WELL AS AN 800-YEAR-OLD FIGHTING *STUD.*

EXACTLY!

AND *FOR*TUNATELY FOR YOU BOYS, THERE'S *MORE* TO MY TALE OF BRAVERY!

AS I WAS **SAY**ING, SINCE THE DAYLIGHT WAS GONE, I NEEDED TO *POKE AROUND* TO MAKE SURE THAT MY FOE *WAS*... IN ACTU*AL*ITY... *DEAD.*

I SCOURED THE CHARRED REMAINS FOR VERIFICATION. THE SPAWN-WIZARD WAS A VERY CRAFTY INDIVIDUAL, SO I DIDN'T WANT TO MAKE ANY MISTAKES.

THE BOSS USUALLY LIKED PROOF. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN PICKY LIKE THAT.

SINCE I COULDN'T FIND ANY OF THE SPAWN'S REMAINS, MY PROOF WOULD HAVE TO BE FOUND ELSEWHERE.

YOUR BOYFRIEND IS **FINISHED,** DEAR MAIDEN.

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND IF I ASK YOU TO *JOIN* HIM.

IF I BROUGHT THE BOSS THE HEAD OF SPAWN'S WICKED MOTHER, THAT WOULD BE MY EVIDENCE. ONLY IF THE SPAWN WERE TRULY DEAD WOULD I HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO DECAPITATE THE WITCH HERSELF.

please...

YOUR *GOD* IS MY *ENEMY.*

SO BEG ALL YOU *WANT.*

I HOPE HE'S *LISTENING.*

BECAUSE OF ALL THE PAIN SHE AND HER OFFSPRING HAD BROUGHT TO THE NEIGHBORING LANDS, I WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT SHE DIED SLOWLY. I WANTED HER TO SUFFER LIKE ALL THOSE INNOCENT VICTIMS HER SON TORTURED.

SO I BEGAN TO CUT HER. SLOWLY.

EEEEE

I REJOICED AT EVERY SCREAM, SAVORING THE MOMENT. I COULD ALMOST *TASTE* VICTORY.

...for the love of God...

...I BEG YOU!

BUT SOMETHING WAS WRONG. I COULDN'T QUITE PUT MY *FINGER* ON IT, BUT THIS WAS ALL GOING DOWN FAR TOO EASILY.

THEN I HEARD HIS VOICE.

HIS HORRIFIC FORM STOOD DIRECTLY BEHIND ME. OBVIOUSLY, I HAD BURNED ONLY HIS *ARMOR*, NOT HIS FLESH. LIKE I *SAID*, HE WAS A *TRICKY* SON-OF-A-GUN.

THIS FINGER IS BUT THE FIRST OF MANY PIECES I SHALL CUT FROM YOUR SATANIC BODY.

HOW **DARE** YOU TOUCH MY MAIDEN?

HOW **DARE** YOU USE HER TO GET AT ME. I'D HAVE THOUGHT THE CREATURES OF HELL HAD MORE COURAGE THAN TO HIDE BEHIND DEFENSELESS WOMEN.

HAS YOUR CREATOR BECOME SUCH A **COWARD?**

TELEPORTING OUT OF HIS BATTLE GEAR WAS PRETTY *SLICK*.

HE'S YOUR CREATOR, TOO!

MY PRINCE-- YOUR BODY--! WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU?!

ALREADY WEARY FROM OUR INITIAL STRUGGLE, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I COULD LAST. I'M STILL AMAZED AT HOW LONG I ENDURED THE TWO-SIDED ATTACK FROM THE SPAWN-WIZARD AND HIS MOTHER.

I COULDN'T FAIL THEM, THE GOOD PEOPLE WHO PUT THEIR FAITH IN ME.

MY LADY IS BUT A CHILD, AN ARTISTIC SOUL. HER HANDIWORKS ARE THINGS OF JOY...

...OF BEAUTY.

BLOW AFTER BLOW I WITHSTOOD, YET SOMEHOW I KNEW I WOULD OVERCOME. THE PEOPLE OF THAT LAND *NEEDED* ME.

TOMORROW SHE MAY PAINT OF MY **VICTORY**, OF HOW THE DEVIL WAS THWARTED IN HIS CHALLENGE TO MY SKILLS.

TELL YOUR MASTER THAT I WILL **NEVER** BE HIS PUPPET. NOT **NOW**... NOT **EVER!!**

OUR EPIC BATTLE CONTINUED. WITH MY SUPERIOR SKILLS, I WAS QUICKLY ABLE TO OVERCOME THE WITCH. AS PANIC TOOK HOLD, HER SPELLS BECAME INCREASINGLY LESS EFFECTIVE. I WAS NOW FREE TO CONCENTRATE EXCLUSIVELY ON HER SON.

HER COAL-BLACK EYES WITNESSED EVERY MEASURE OF HARM I INFLICTED UPON HER BOY. IT WARMED MY HEART.

HOW MANY TIMES HAD THEY CACKLED SADISTICALLY WHILE STRIPPING THE FLESH FROM A CRYING BABY, I ASKED MYSELF.

PROBABLY MORE TIMES THAN EITHER COULD REMEMBER. EVEN MURDER CAN BECOME TEDIOUS, I SUPPOSE.

WELL, IT WAS HIGH TIME SOMEONE TURNED THE TABLES ON THOSE TWO...

...SHOWING THEM FOR THE MONSTERS THEY WERE.

MY PRINCE... WHAT HAVE YOU BECOME?

SOON, I GAINED THE ADVANTAGE AGAIN. THE BOSS HAD TRAINED ME WELL IN THE WAYS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SPAWN.

FOR INSTANCE, WHEN FACED WITH AN OVERWHELMING THREAT, A SEASONED SPAWN WILL INSTINCTIVELY RELY ON HIS PHYSICAL SKILLS. ONLY RARELY WILL HE FEEL AT RISK ENOUGH TO DRAIN ANY OF HIS ENERGY IN RESPONSE. THESE SPAWN-WIZARDS ARE AS SKILLED AT HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT AS ANY MAN OR CREATURE THAT MAY CHALLENGE THEM. SENSING A SLIGHT IMPERFECTION IN MY PLAN OF ATTACK, HE FEINTED, THEN STRUCK.

MY OVER-CONFIDENCE HAD BETRAYED ME.

I HAD BEEN RELIEVED OF MY FAITHFUL BROADSWORD.

NOW COMPLETELY VULNERABLE, I HAD TO THINK QUICKLY!

BREATHING FIRE AT HIM WAS THE ONLY TYPE OF ATTACK I HADN'T TRIED YET. ON CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, I DECIDED NOT TO USE THAT ACE UP MY SLEEVE... YET. THE WIZARD HAD TO BE CLOSER FOR MY FLAMES TO BE EFFECTIVE.

I HAD TO WAIT FOR HIM TO COME IN NICE AND TIGHT AND ATTEMPT HIS KILLING BLOW BEFORE MY LAST GALLANT ATTEMPT AT VICTORY WAS PUT TO THE TEST.

HE DIDN'T FAIL ME.

WITH LIGHTNING SPEED, I POUNCED ON HIM. THOUGH HE WAS MUCH LARGER THAN I, MY GRIT AND DETERMINATION WERE CLEARLY TRAITS NEW TO HIS EXPERIENCE.

I SWEAR BY WHAT LIFE REMAINS THAT **YOU SHALL PAY** FOR THE LIVES OF THESE VILLAGERS!

WHAT KIND OF **MONSTER** WOULD EAT THE **HEARTS** OF **CHILDREN** ?!!

A VERY *HUNGRY*, DESERVING ONE.

THOUGH I MUST CONFESS, I *DO* PREFER THE HEARTS OF *GROWN* HUMANS. THEY'RE *FAR* MEATIER, WITH LOTS AND *LOTS* OF *FLAVOR*.

A CHILD'S ORGANS AREN'T *NEARLY* AS RIPE!

AAAAAM!

DAMN YOUR SOUL!

Ah, DEAR BOY, YOU'RE *FAR* TOO LATE FOR *THAT*.

I SERVE THE *MASTER* AND THE *DARKNESS*. HE WISHED TO SEE IF YOU WERE WORTHY OF A PLACE IN HIS ARMY... WANTED TO KNOW IF YOU COULD BE A *LEADER*.

IT'LL BE MY *PLEASURE* TO TELL HIM THAT *I*, A *NATIVE* OF HELL, AM FAR BETTER QUALIFIED THAN SOME EARTHBORN *BEGINNER*!

FASSH

THEN, MY MOMENT OF TRUTH. IT WAS NOW OR NEVER!

FRENCH-FRIED HIM AGAIN, MAKING SURE I STRUCK FLESH, NOT ARMOR, THIS TIME.

DIRECT HIT!

Uh?

WHAT TRICKERY IS *THIS?!*

IT'S *OVER*, HELLSPAWN! YOU'VE *LOST!*

NOW, THIS MYSTICAL **SWORD** I'VE CREATED DRAINS EVEN MORE. THOUGH IT SHALL SERVE A VERY WORTHY CAUSE...

HIS C-CAPE AND CHAINS... *THEY'RE ALIVE!*

AND SO AM **I**, DEAR LOVE. THE EVIL POWER THAT CREATED ME DIDN'T WARN THIS ENEMY TO THE **EXTENT** OF MY **MAGIC.**

HOW CARELESSLY HE FORGOT MY **COSTUME.** NOW IT BINDS HIM INTO SUBMISSION.

PREPARE YOURSELF, DEMON. YOU ARE ABOUT TO **DIE.**

IT WAS A SIMPLE TASK TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM YOUR FLAMES, THOUGH IT WASTED PRECIOUS ENERGY.

IT WAS FINALLY OVER. ONLY THING LEFT TO DO WAS COLLECT MY PRIZED TROPHY FOR THE BOSS.

...TO SEND YOU BACK TO HELL!

HIS HEAD!

THE BATTLE WAS FINALLY OVER.

please... don't hurt me...

...don't...

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR, MY LOVE.

I DID ONLY WHAT WAS NECESSARY TO PROTECT YOU. THAT MY TRUE APPEARANCE WAS REVEALED TO YOU IS UNFORTUNATE. YOU NOW UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME WITHOUT ARMOR.

I NEEDED YOU TO WANT ME FOR MYSELF. I'M TRULY SORRY IF I'VE HURT YOU IN ANY WAY.

I SWEAR I MEANT YOU NO HARM.

STAY AWAY! PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE, MONSTER!

HELP!! PLEASE-- sob SOMEBODY HELP!!

DON'T DO THIS TO ME.

SOMEHOW, THE EVIL WITCH ESCAPED INTO THE NIGHT... AND EVEN THAT WORKED TO MY ADVANTAGE. SHE WAS NEVER QUITE THE SAME AFTER THAT FIGHT, REPEATING THE STORY OVER AND OVER.

I BEG YOU.

SO MY LEGEND WAS BORN. THE WITCH'S WITLESS RETELLINGS BECAME MORE ERRATIC AS SHE WANDERED, VILLAGE TO HAMLET. OVER THE GENERATIONS, OTHER STORYTELLERS RENDERED THE STORY WITH WIMSY AND MAGNIFICENCE. YOU WANT PROOF? IT'S AS CLOSE AS YOUR NEAREST LIBRARY.

THOUGH THE PICTURES AREN'T QUITE RIGHT, MY LEGACY HAS ENDURED. *I WAS THE FIRST* DRAGON!

IT'S NOT THE NAME I GIVE MYSELF, AND I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY COLORED ME GREEN, BUT HEY! THAT'S SHOW BIZ! I'M NOT COMPLAINING!

AS FOR MY BOSS, WELL SUFFICE IT TO SAY HE WAS PLEASED WITH MY WORK.

EXCELLENT, dear child!

You have done a most admirable job. Not only did you prove that my new Spawn has the potential to become a fine officer, you also managed to destroy the only thing he held dear:

...another's love for him.

I now make you whole again. You've served me well.

WELL! THERE YOU HAVE IT, BOYS!

NOT ONLY DID I GET A RAISE... I PUT DRAGONS... THAT IS, ME... INTO WESTERN CULTURE!

KINDA BEAUTIFUL, AIN'T IT?!

UH?

BOZO.

LOSER.

WHY... YOU UNGRATEFUL SWINE! AFTER ALL THE CASH I LAID OUT, TOO! WHY, I OUGHTTA...

UMPF!

SMEK!

THAT'S IT, NO MORE MISTER NICE GUY!! WHEN I GET FINISHED WITH THOSE LITTLE RUG RATS, THEY'LL WISH...

? WHAT'S THIS?!

New York Times

STOCKS CR

PETEY KILLS TODDY. OUCH!

"EVEN ALLEGED CRIMINAL KINGPIN VITO GRAVANO HAD SENT FOR PROTECTION IN THE FORM OF THE ITALIAN BODYGUARD OVERT-KILL. VITO ANGRILY LAYS BLAME AT THE FEET OF 'THOSE COSTUMED DO-GOODERS.'"

"POLICE STILL HAVE NO LEADS IN THE MYSTERIOUS DEATHS OF NEW YORK'S CRIME LORDS. THE VICTIMS WERE BRUTALLY MURDERED IN THEIR OFFICES. ONE LINE OF INVESTIGATION IS DIRECTED TOWARD A RENEGADE YOUNGBLOOD-TYPE OR SHADOWHAWK-INSPIRED WACKO.

WHAT?

IT'S TIME I PAID MR. VITO A LITTLE VISIT. AIN'T NO WAY SOMEONE ELSE GETS CREDIT FOR MY KILLS!

"ESPECIALLY NOT THAT PUNK, *SPAWN*."*

THOUGH IT IS NO LONGER AS NECESSARY AS IT HAD BEEN, **AL SIMMONS,** STRICTLY BY HABIT, RESTS DAILY. HIS NEW CIRCUMSTANCE, AS AN AGENT OF EVIL FROM DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF SOME NETHERWORLD, HASN'T ERASED HIS HUMANISTIC SELF-IMAGE.

HABITS -- ROUTINES -- IN THESE NEW TIMES, THEY ARE HIS ONLY SOURCE FOR **TRANQUILITY**...

...IF YOU WILL, FOR **ESCAPE.**

SLEEP.

HEY, BUD!

HOW MANY TIMES I GOTTA ***TELL*** YOU CREEPS TO ***STAY AWAY*** FROM THE ***BACK DOOR!***

YA ***HEAR*** ME?!

I'M GETTING FRIGGIN' ***TIRED*** OF YOU TRYING TO STEAL THE FOOD SCRAPS FROM MR. NUNOZ'S RESTAURANT. THOUGHT I MADE MYSELF ***CLEAR*** LAST TIME.

YOU MUST BE THE ***DEAF*** ONE OF THE BUNCH!

URRK

OKAY!

OKAY!

TAKE IT **EASY.** NO SENSE GETTING IN SUCH A BIG **HUFF.** I'LL BE OUT OF YOUR WAY IN A MINUTE.

DIDN'T KNOW SOMEONE COULD TAKE SUCH **PRIDE** IN PROTECTING SCRAPS OF LEFT-OVER LIVER.

*FOR DETAILS OF THE VIOLATOR'S VISIT TO VITO GRAVANO'S OFFICE, SEE THE VIOLATOR'S OWN MINI-SERIES, COMING IN 1994 -- Tom.

Oh -- A SMART ASS, eh?

I DON'T *NEED* NO GRIEF FROM SOME TWO-BIT DRUNK *LOSER!*

GET ME?!

GUH!

AS IT HAPPENS, AL **WAS** GETTING UP TO LEAVE WHEN THE MUSCLE-BOUND STIFF CHALLENGED HIM. YEARS AGO, AL'S MILITARY TRAINING TAUGHT HIM THAT NOT EVERY CONFRONTATION LEADS TO BATTLE... THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A PEACEFUL RETREAT IS GOOD STRATEGY.

AS HIS MISSIONS BECAME MORE AND MORE SECRETIVE, AL DEVELOPED A REPITOIRE OF SUBTLE REACTIONS.

THAT NEED HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER: HIS TOTAL ENERGY IS LIMITED. **AL**, A.K.A. **SPAWN**, NEEDS TO KEEP HIS PHYSICAL CONFLICTS TO A MINIMUM.

I'LL BREAK YOUR *NOSE!*

SMART ASS!

IT TOOK **LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS** A LONG TIME TO GRASP THAT NOTION. HIS **INSTINCTS** TOLD HIM THAT EVERY SITUATION HAD TO BE SETTLED RIGHT THERE, ON THE SPOT. FORTUNATELY, HE LEARNED BETTER.

POWER USAGE WOULD BE STUPID RIGHT NOW.

DAMMIT...

I SAID I'D LEAVE...

YOU'RE RIGHT. IN A BODY BAG.

SOME DAYS IT DOESN'T PAY TO TRY AND BE NICE.

GHAA-

-AAGH!

SPOK

PUNCH

SWAK

LUCKILY FOR HIM, AL NEEDN'T RELY SOLELY ON HIS POWERS TO TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF.

HOLD STILL, TUBBY...

...I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

SNAP

SNAP

THUNK!

GET THE PICTURE, NOW?

I COULD'VE **RAMMED** THESE BOARDS SO FAR THROUGH THOSE BEADY LITTLE EYES THAT YOUR **BRAINS** WOULD BE OOZING OUT THE **SOCKETS!**

YA SEE, I DON'T **LIKE** BEING MUSCLED. **ESPECIALLY** WHEN I **SAID** I'D LEAVE.

THUNK!

NOW THEN.

UNLESS YOU WANT ME TO GET **REALLY** PISSED OFF, I SUGGEST WE SWITCH ROLES.

IT'S **MY** TURN TO ASK **YOU** TO LEAVE.

PRONTO!

Y-YES SIR.

GETTIN' TIRED OF PEOPLE CONSTANTLY INVADING **MY** TURF.

I JUST MIGHT HAVE TO SEND OUT A LONG, **LOUD** SIGNAL:

THIS IS **SPAWN** TERRITORY!

"WE KNOW YOU'VE BEEN *MESSING* WITH US, FITZGERALD. NO ONE LIKES A *RAT.*

"SO YOU'D BETTER BE A VERY GOOD BOY AND HOPE WE DON'T FIND NOTHING *INCRIMINATING.*

WELL, GOTTA *GO* NOW. KISS THAT BEAUTIFUL WIFE OF YOURS FOR ME. SHE SURE IS A LOOKER. I'VE BEEN *WATCHING* HER FOR ALMOST *THREE WEEKS* NOW. PRETTY SEXY *NIGHTGOWN* SHE'S BEEN WEARING.

YOU SONUVABITCH.

NOW NOW, TERRY. IT'S A DIRTY JOB, BUT SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO IT.

KISS THAT *BABY* OF YOURS FOR ME, TOO.

CLICK

"'CAUSE IF WE *DO*, THERE AIN'T *NO* PLACE YOU'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO HIDE FROM US. AND WHEN WE FIND YOU, WORDS CAN'T DESCRIBE THE KIND OF *PAIN* WE CAN INFLICT.

IT WILL BE NEARLY TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE TERRY MOVES...

...ANOTHER FORTY BEFORE HE STOPS SWEATING.

NEXT ISSUE:

GRANT MORRISON
GREG CAPULLO

ISSUE 16

"THERE IT IS, *MAJOR VALE*, THAT'S THE PLACE.

"I CALL IT *SIMMONSVILLE*. PRIVATE JOKE.

"WE'RE QUITE SAFE *HERE*, OF COURSE, BUT I'D LIKE YOU TO KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON OUR TWO... WELL, WHAT *CAN* I CALL THEM? NOT GUINEA PIGS.

" 'VOLUNTEERS.'

JEEZ, HOW'D WE GET OURSELVES INTO *THIS* ONE, BREWER? THIS PLACE IS FREAKIN' ME OUT TOTALLY, MAN.

YOU EVER BEEN TO *DISNEY-LAND*?

SURE I'VE BEEN TO DISNEYLAND. WHAT THE HELL'S *THAT* GOT TO DO WITH ANYTHING?

I DUNNO, IT JUST KINDA REMINDS ME OF THIS PLACE.

IT'S LIKE NOTHING FITS, YOU KNOW? THERE'S A CHURCH RIGHT NEXT TO A *WATER-SLIDE* AND A FACTORY IN THE MIDDLE OF A *PARK* AND THE WHOLE PLACE IS *DESERTED* LIKE IT...

HEADS UP, STEVENS! WE GOT *INCOMING!*

KRRRAAATCH!

"WELCOME TO *SIMMONSVILLE*, MAJOR VALE.

"OUR VERY OWN LITTLE PIECE OF HELL ON EARTH."

oh my God

"IT HAPPENED JUST OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, MAJOR:

"... A ROUTINE UNDERGROUND *A-BOMB* TEST HERE IN *NEVADA* OPENED A *HOLE* INTO WHAT WE THOUGHT WAS ANOTHER DIMENSION.

"WE'D STUMBLED ONTO A DOORWAY TO *HELL*.

"THAT OTHER DIMENSION TURNED OUT TO BE *HELL*, MAJOR VALE.

"WE SENT IN AN ARMED TASK FORCE AND THEY WERE NEVER SEEN AGAIN. LAST THING WE HEARD FROM THEM WAS A GARBLED RADIO MESSAGE ABOUT WATERFALLS OF BLOOD AND FOGS THAT DISSOLVED FLESH.

SKLUTCH

NO WAY!

NO FRIGGIN' WAY, MAN!

THIS AIN'T *REAL*, STEVENS.

IT'S GOTTA BE SOME KINDA HALLUCINATION. THEY'RE TESTING A *DRUG* ON US OR SOMETHING. IT CAN'T BE...

"ONE THING WE DID FIND OUT THOUGH, IS THAT HELL IS COMPOSED OF A SUBSTANCE WE CALL *PSYCHOPLASM*.

"PSYCHOPLASM IS A MATERIAL OF A KIND *UNKNOWN* IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD. IT CHANGES IN RESPONSE TO MENTAL STATES.

"WHATEVER YOU'RE THINKING OF, WHATEVER YOU DESIRE OR FEAR, PSYCHOPLASM *BECOMES* THAT THING.

BREWER!

Oh JESUS...

BREWER? LARRY?

WHERE ARE YOU, LARRY?

WHERE ARE YOU?

BRAKABRAKABRA

BOO!

YAAAA!

NOOO(

"JUST IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD MEAN TO THE *U.S. MILITARY* IF WE COULD GAIN CONTROL OF SUCH A SUBSTANCE, MAJOR VALE.

"WHICH BRINGS ME TO *AL SIMMONS.*

DON'T HURT ME.

PLEASE DON'T... I GOT A *WIFE*... PLEASE...

"THERE ARE... *PRESENCES* IN HELL, MAJOR. I CONTACTED ONE OF THOSE PRESENCES AND MADE A DEAL WITH IT. I GAVE IT SIMMONS FOR ITS *ARMY*, IT GAVE ME PSYCHOPLASM.

"SIMMONS WAS A GOOD MAN, ONE OF OUR BEST. GOD KNOWS, I TRAINED HIM MYSELF, TAUGHT HIM EVERYTHING I KNOW. BUT HE WENT SOFT, HE BECAME EXPENDABLE AND SO I MADE A *DEAL*.

GIMME A BREAK, SOLDIER.

"THE TOWN YOU'RE LOOKING AT, THE TOWN WHERE OUR TWO UNFORTUNATE VOLUNTEERS ARE CURRENTLY FACING THEIR WORST NIGHTMARES, IS COMPOSED *ENTIRELY* OF PSYCHOPLASM.

STOP! PLEASE! *Oh GOD!* *STOP!*

WILL YA QUIT WITH THE 'GOD' ALLA TIME?

YER MAKIN' ME *NAUSEOUS*.

SHOW SOME SPINE, WHY DON'CHA? YOUR *BUDDY* SURE DID. *HEE HEE.*

BA DUMP

BA DUMP

NOOo.

"WHEN WE SENT SIMMONS TO HELL, WE STOLE HIS *MEMORIES*. THOSE MEMORIES, ACTING UPON RAW PSYCHOPLASM, CREATED *SIMMONSVILLE*-- A FAKE TOWN BUILT FROM THE JUMBLE OF ONE MAN'S RECOLLECTIONS.

"HOUSES THAT HE LIVED IN, THE SCHOOLS HE WENT TO, PLAYGROUNDS HE PLAYED IN, FACTORIES AND CHURCHES AND PARKS-- ALL RECREATED HERE IN THE DESERT, ABOVE THE DOORWAY TO HELL.

"THIS IS WHERE WE'VE BEEN CONDUCTING OUR RESEARCH, MAJOR. THIS IS WHAT I WANTED YOU TO SEE.

SLAM!

INTERESTED?

THAT'S THE CRAZIEST GODDAMN THING I EVER HEARD, *MR. WYNN*, BUT I CAN'T DENY WHAT I JUST SAW WITH MY OWN EYES.

THOSE THINGS WERE... *DEMONS*? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE TELLIN' ME?

I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW I CAN TAKE THIS ON BOARD... I...

IT *IS* ALL A LITTLE OVERWHELMING, MAJOR VALE. I CAN UNDERSTAND THAT.

WHY NOT THINK THINGS OVER AND WE'LL TALK AGAIN IN AN HOUR OR TWO, WHEN I'VE COMPLETED MY DAILY *WORKOUT*.

HOW DOES THAT SOUND?

CUT TO NEW YORK CITY.

HIGH ABOVE A TWILIT MAZE OF DINGY, RAINSWEPT ALLEYWAYS, THE SPAWN BROODS.

ONCE I WAS AL SIMMONS BUT I GOT SHAFTED, SENT TO HELL.

I MADE A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL AND GOT SHAFTED ALL OVER AGAIN. STORY OF MY FRIGGIN' LIFE. AND DEATH. I GAVE HIM MY SOUL, HE GAVE ME A WHOLE MESS OF GRIEF AND PAIN.

QUESTIONS.

FOR EVERY ANSWER I GET, THERE ARE MORE **QUESTIONS.**

THINGS USED TO MAKE SENSE BUT NOW THEY'RE JUST GETTING CRAZIER: PLOTS, DEALS, HEAVEN AND HELL, ANGELS AND DEMONS RUNNING LOOSE ON THE STREETS OF NEW YORK.

AND ME. WHAT AM I? WHAT AM I REALLY?

AND NOW I'M SOME KIND OF UNDEAD FREAK WITH A FACE LIKE A STALE PIZZA AND A MEMORY THAT'S SHOT TO HELL.

I'M FINDING OUT MORE AND MORE EVERY DAY BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT REALLY HAPPENED OR WHAT I REALLY AM.

AL SIMMONS IS DEAD. CHAPEL PULLED THE TRIGGER BUT WHAT I HAVE TO KNOW IS WHO GAVE THE ORDER?

WHO SET ME UP?

WHO SENT ME TO HELL?

AND IF I'M DEAD, HOW COME I HAVE A **BODY**? SINCE WHEN DID DEAD GUYS GET TO HAVE BODIES?

AND IF I'M **HERE**, WHAT DID THEY BURY IN AL SIMMONS' **GRAVE**?

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT.

I KNOW WHERE I HAVE TO GO EVEN THOUGH IT SCARES THE CRAP OUT OF ME. THERE'S SOMETHING I SHOULD HAVE DONE A LONG TIME AGO.

BUT FIRST I NEED TO LET OFF SOME STEAM.

MAYBE SPREAD A LITTLE OF THIS PAIN AROUND.

WELL, WHAT HAVE WE GOT HERE?

ONE MORE PIECE OF *GARBAGE* THAT DIDN'T GET SWEPT AWAY. I DUNNO WHAT THIS CITY'S COMIN' TO, I REALLY DON'T.

BACK OFF, GUYS.

I DON'T REALLY THINK YOU WANT TO DO THIS...

Oh YEAH. WELL, I DON'T GIVE A FLYIN' FART *WHAT* YOU THINK, SCUMBAG.

WE'RE JUST A COUPLE OF CONCERNED CITIZENS TRYIN' TO DO SOMETHIN' ABOUT THE *HOMELESS* PROBLEM. WE CALL IT THE '*BURN A BUM*' SCHEME, DON'T WE BERNIE?

'BURN A BUM.' HUR HUR HUR

SOLINE

SO GET READY TO BURN IN HELL, 'CAUSE...

HELL?

Uh?

THEN LET'S TALK.

JEEZ! IT'S THAT GUY! THE SPAWN GUY! THE SPOOK!

YOU REALLY WANT TO TALK ABOUT HELL, BUD?

BLOW HIM AWAY, BERNIE!

YOU HEARD HIM, BERNIE. GO AHEAD.

BLOW ME AWAY.

MY HAND? ...YOU'RE... ah .

LOOKS LIKE BERNIE'S TOO BUSY RIGHT NOW.

YOU WANT TO TAKE A SHOT?

SCUM!

JESUS, GIMME A BREAK. WE WEREN'T GONNA TORCH THE GUY. IT WAS JUST A *JOKE*...

IT'S NOT FAIR... USIN' *POWERS* AGAINST NORMAL GUYS...

YOU THINK I NEED POWERS TO DEAL WITH SCUM LIKE YOU?

DO YOU?

...NNNZZZ

NNNNGGGG

... MY HAND...

SORRY ABOUT THAT. GUESS I WAS JUST FEELING PISSED.

GUESS YOU WERE.

I KNOW IT'S HARD 'ROUND HERE BUT TRY TO KEEP OUT OF TROUBLE.

AND IF ANYONE COMES LOOKING FOR ME, TELL THEM I'VE GONE TO DIG UP AN OLD FRIEND.

SURE I WILL, HELLSPAWN.

SURE I WILL.

NOT FAR AWAY, IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN, IN A MIRROR-WALLED BUILDING WITH NO NAME AND NO NUMBER...

...I WOULD NEVER QUESTION A DIRECT ORDER, NO, BUT ISN'T THIS A LITTLE ...WELL, *DRASTIC?*

I'VE DONE MY BEST TO RUN TERRAN AFFAIRS QUIETLY AND WITHOUT...

WELL, IF WE'VE HAD TO WITHDRAW OUR DIPLOMATIC ENVOY FROM HELL THE PROBLEM *IS* SERIOUS, YES. YES, I UNDERSTAND.

RIGHT AWAY... YES.

PROBLEMS, GABRIELLE?

NEW ORDERS FROM UPSTAIRS. REMEMBER THE EARTHBOUND HELL-SPAWN WHO DEFEATED *ANGELA* RECENTLY?

WELL, APPARENTLY THIS SPAWN IS *SPECIAL* AND SPECIAL MEANS *DANGEROUS*. WE'VE BEEN EMPOWERED TO CREATE OUR OWN SOLDIER TO *DESTROY* THE CREATURE.

THE BALANCE OF POWER MUST BE *SERIOUSLY* COMPROMISED IF *CONTROL'S* PREPARED TO INTERVENE SO DIRECTLY IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE EARTHLY PLANE.

LET'S JUST HOPE OUR ORBITAL ANGEL STATION IS UP AND RUNNING, *MICHAELA*.

WE HAVE WORK TO DO.

...THAT'S THE SITUATION AS IT STANDS. WE HAVE FULL AUTHORITY TO EMPOWER A HUMAN AGENT TO DESTROY THE HELLSPAWN.

IS THE STATION READY?

OF COURSE. IT WAS A SIMPLE MATTER TO HOLLOW OUT THE BODIES OF THE HUMANS HERE AND INSTALL OUR OWN ESSENCES WITHIN THEM.

THIS STATION IS NOW FULLY OPERATIONAL, GABRIELLE.

WE WILL BEGIN THE PROCEDURE IMMEDIATELY.

I WILL CONTACT THE AVENGING ANGEL OF THE FIFTH HEAVEN AND ARRANGE FOR THE TRANSFER OF THE ELEMENTAL FIRE.

YOUR SOLDIER WILL BE FULLY EMPOWERED AND READY FOR COMBAT BEFORE SUNRISE YOUR TIME.

A SOLDIER?

FEARFUL TIMES ARE UPON US, IT SEEMS.

WHAT KIND OF HUMAN HAS THE STRENGTH TO BEAR THE ELEMENTAL FIRE?

THE SUBJECT HAS ALREADY BEEN SELECTED.

I'M BRINGING HIM UP NOW.

READY WHEN YOU ARE, GENTLE-MEN.

WOK

SKRAK

CHO!

CHUNT!

WHAT-EVER THEY'RE PAYING YOU GENTLEMEN, IT'S TOO MUCH.

YOU FIGHT LIKE LITTLE GIRLS. IF I WAS AN ENEMY YOU'D BE DEAD MEAT.

AS IT IS, YOU'RE OUT OF A *JOB.*

ACTIVATING TRANSFERENCE.

FIRE THOSE EXCUSES FOR SOLDIERS IN THERE AND TELL MAJOR VALE I'LL BE WITH HIM IN...

...MY GOD.

SIR...?

...MY GOD...

HOW DID I GET HERE?

WHO THE HELL *ARE* YOU PEOPLE? ARE YOU *HIS* PEOPLE?

ANSWER ME, DAMN YOU!

WE DO NOT SERVE THE MALEBOLGIA.

WE ARE THE SERVANTS OF A... HIGHER POWER.

*AS WILL **YOU** BE WHEN OUR WORK IS DONE.*

NO, WAIT! YOU DON'T KNOW WHO I AM! I...

EFARARK

IT'S *BURNING!* GOD HELP ME, IT'S *BURNING!*

THIS IS THE PLACE.

THIS IS WHERE THEY BURIED ME.

WHAT AM I SO SCARED OF?

THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING IN HERE.

SIMMONS

THERE CAN'T BE.

THEY CAN'T HAVE BURIED AL SIMMONS HERE BECAUSE I'M AL SIMMONS.

I'LL PULL BACK THE LID OF THIS GODDAMN COFFIN AND I'LL LOOK IN AND I'LL SEE...

NO.

NO!

THE SMELL! LIKE SOME SICK, ANCIENT THING BREATHING IN MY FACE... FILTHY... ROTTEN...

IT'S ME. DEAR GOD IN HEAVEN, IT'S MY BODY.

AND IF THIS... THIS THING IS ALL THAT'S LEFT OF AL SIMMONS...

WHAT AM I? GOD HELP ME...

WHAT AM I?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?

OUR WORK IS ACCOMPLISHED.

...HURTS... IT HURTS...

...WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME?...

...AAHHHHH...

YOU ARE **OUR** CREATURE NOW. WE HAVE MADE YOU STRONG AND TERRIBLE SO THAT YOU MAY GO BACK AND **DESTROY** THE HELLSPAWN.

THE ELEMENTAL FIRE OF HEAVEN BURNS WITHIN YOU NOW. YOU ARE NO LONGER LIVING, NO LONGER HUMAN.

RISE UP! BE BORN AGAIN! SOLDIER OF THE LIGHT!

ANTI-SPAWN!

AAAAnnn

NEXT
MALEBOLGIA
IS THE DEVIL!

SOMEWHERE IN TIME, THERE IS LAUGHTER...

HA HA HA HA

HA HA

HA HA HA HA

THE MOCKING, MIRTHLESS LAUGHTER OF THE BAD GOD, THE **MALBOLGIA**, AS HE SURVEYS HIS WORK AND DECLARES IT GOOD...

... AS HE GAZES DOWN UPON THE MAN HE HAS CONDEMNED TO AN UNLIVING HELL.

HIS CREATURE, HIS **KNIGHT** OF THE PIT...

HIS HELLSPAWN.

SIMMONS

Ah, my good and faithful servant, you're determined to learn a little more of the truth, I see.

I hope it **hurts**.

You've learned that the body you currently wear is not your earthly body, which lies decaying in this grave.

Now, let me **show** you something, my little Hellspawn. It may bring **you** understanding and **me** a moment's sport.

I HEAR A VOICE IN MY HEAD. THE VOICE I CAN NEVER FORGET, LIKE FINGERNAILS GRATING ON A BLACKBOARD.

I FEEL HIS COLD HAND AROUND MY SOUL, LIKE I'M **DYING** AGAIN...

POOF

AND SUDDENLY, I'M SOMEWHERE ELSE, AWAY FROM THE RAIN.

WHERE **AM I?**

This place is a doorway into **my** realm, a gate that stands open onto Hell. This particular portal occupies part of a military testing ground in Nevada.

Surely you **recognize** what you see?

THIS STREET... I **LIVED** HERE WHEN I WAS A KID... THAT CHURCH IS WHERE I WAS **MARRIED**...

MY GOD, WHAT **IS** THIS PLACE?

How kind of you to call me **God**.

Hell is built of a substance your people have taken to calling **psychoplasm**, which adapts itself to human thoughts and fears.

When **you** died, your memories acted upon psychoplasm to create all of **this**.

Just as your new Spawn body is composed of psychoplasm and can change its shape, so too can this gateway assume the forms of any thoughts or emotions imprinted upon it.

Look! Do you remember that day on the lake, when you bent the knee and begged **Wanda** to marry you? How **touching**...

WANDA? NO, LEAVE HER OUT OF THIS... NOT MY WIFE.

NOOOOO

Not your wife, just a stray memory given flesh. But how such memories must sting when you think of her in the arms of another man!

Oh, I delight in the sweet, sad taste of your pain, little Hellspawn. For you, there can **be** only pain. I savor the bitterness of your tears on my tongue.

Each day, you are more **my** slave. It will not be long before you crawl towards my throne to take your place in my **army**.

I look forward to seeing you.

HAHAHA HAHA

SOMEWHERE IN TIME, THERE IS LAUGHTER, BUT THE BAD GOD DOES NOT LAUGH **ALONE.** THERE IS ANOTHER SOUND IN THE AIRLESS DARK...

THE COLD LAUGHTER OF **ANGELS.**

IT IS DONE.

THE SOLDIER IS READY. OUR **ANTI-SPAWN** HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR HIS FIRST BATTLE.

THEN KEY HIM TO THE HELLSPAWN'S AURA PROFILE, INITIATE TRANSMISSION.

AND PRAY FOR A SWIFT KILL.

THERE IS A BRIEF SOUND, LIKE A CHOIR CATCHING ITS BREATH, AND A SILVER WHITE COMET EXPLODES DOWN THROUGH THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE.

WHERE ARE YOU, YOU BASTARD ?!

YOU TOOK MY LIFE, YOU TOOK MY SOUL!

WHERE ARE YOU?! I...

WHOOM

DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL THAT WAS BUT MY SKIN'S CRAWLING WITH STATIC.

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THERE...

SOMETHING BAD.

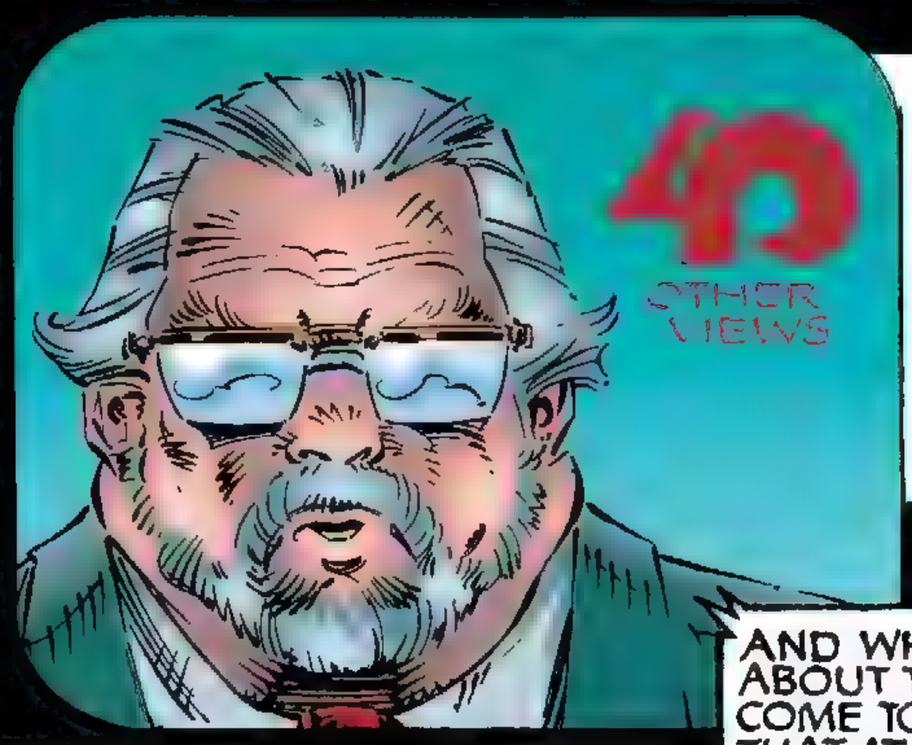
HELLSPAWN!

I'VE COME FOR YOU!

...MEANWHILE, IN ***WASHINGTON,*** GOVERNMENT SOURCES ARE REFUSING TO CONFIRM OR DENY RUMORS ABOUT THE DIS-APPEARANCE OF CONTROVERCIAL PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR ***JASON WYNN.***

WYNN ***WAS*** SCHEDULED TO APPEAR IN A LIVE TELEVISION DEBATE EARLIER.

KYK



...CAN CALL ME A CRANK ALL THEY WANT BUT I SAY THE WHOLE WYNN DISAPPEARANCE STORY STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN OF CONSPIRACY AND COVER-UP!

JUST WHAT ***WERE*** WYNN'S CONNECTIONS TO ALLEGED ***YOUNGBLOOD*** COVERT OPERATIONS AND ALL THOSE OTHER SNEAKY LITTLE DIRTY-TRICKS OUTINGS THAT NOBODY SEEMS TO WANT TO REPORT?

AND WHAT DID WYNN HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE NEW INFORMATION THAT'S COME TO LIGHT WHICH SUGGESTS THAT ***LT. COL. AL SIMMONS,*** WHO DIED SIX YEARS AGO, MAY HAVE BEEN ***MURDERED*** BY HIS OWN PEOPLE?

PRETTY STRANGE THEN THAT JASON WYNN SHOULD SUDDENLY KYK ...BEST FOR YOUR DOG, BEST FOR YOUR POCKET.

WAS THAT SOMETHING ON THE NEWS ABOUT ***AL?***

Uh... NOT REALLY. THEY'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT THIS JASON WYNN THING. I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D WANT TO HEAR IT AGAIN, WANDA ...

I NEVER LIKED THAT GUY, **WYNN.**

HE CAME AROUND A COUPLE OF TIMES WHEN AL AND I WERE MARRIED AND HE ALWAYS GAVE ME THE CREEPS.

WELL, JASON WAS INVOLVED IN A LOT OF BAD STUFF BUT HE ALWAYS MANAGED TO KEEP HIS NOSE CLEAN.

I GUESS THAT'S WHY AL FINALLY FELL OUT WITH HIM.

IT'S WEIRD, YOU KNOW... I KEEP **THINKING** ABOUT AL. IT'S... WELL, IT'S LIKE HE WAS SOMEHOW **THERE** IN A WAY THAT HE WASN'T BEFORE... I DON'T KNOW...

IT'S KIND OF SPOOKY, I GUESS.

AS LONG AS YOU DON'T STOP THINKING ABOUT **ME,** HONEY.

NOT IN A MILLION YEARS, TERRY. YOU KNOW THAT.

AND WHO KNOWS ABOUT JASON WYNN OR WHETHER HE'S VANISHED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH ANYWAY?

I MEAN, DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

KLIK

MORE THAN YOU THINK, WANDA BLAKE...

... FOR JASON WYNN HAS BEEN REBORN AS THE ANTI-SPAWN AND STANDS FACE TO FACE WITH HIS OLD ADVERSARY, AL SIMMONS--

--THOUGH NEITHER MAN SUSPECTS.

I'VE COME TO DESTROY YOU, HELLSPAWN.

YEAH?

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY.

SHRAK

WHATEVER HE THROWS AT ME, IT HITS LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN.

FEELS LIKE EVERYTHING INSIDE ME JUST CAUGHT FIRE. LIKE HOT GLASS AND ACID IN MY VEINS. EVERYTHING SPINS AND A WALL COMES UP BEHIND ME. COLORS...

SKRASSSH

UNNH!

LIGHTNING CRACKLING DOWN MY NERVOUS SYSTEM.

I CAN SMELL INCENSE AND OLD WOOD... HURT BAD... THIS IS WHERE WE WERE MARRIED... WANDA... BUT IT'S NOT A CHURCH, IS IT? ... JUST HELL PRETENDING TO BE A CHURCH...

GOD, I'M IN AGONY!

AND THOSE VOICES SURE AIN'T CHOIRBOYS...

LOOKEE HERE, WHAT WE GOT?

IS IT A HELLSPAWN? SMELLS LIKE A HELLSPAWN.

IT'S A HELLSPAWN ALL RIGHT. NOT SO HIGH AND MIGHTY NOW, IS HE?

LET'S SEE HIM ORDER US AROUND.

I GOT AN IDEA. LET'S TAKE HIS UNIFORM WHILE IT'S STILL STUNNED. NO REASON WHY WE SHOULDN'T BE FINE CAPTAINS IN HELL'S ARMY.

WON'T THE UNIFORM BE BONDED TO HIS NERVOUS SYSTEM?

NOT ONCE WE'VE PEELED HIM LIKE A

WHUMMP!

STAND AWAY FROM HIM!

HE'S MINE!

FILTH! DO YOU HEAR ME?

HE'S MINE!

EEE

EE

EEAA

STINK OF BURNING MEAT AND SULFUR.

WHO IS THIS GUY? NEVER FACED SO MUCH RAW POWER. WHAT THE HELL DOES HE WANT?

WHAT IF HE'S STRONGER THAN ME?

AND HOW COME I FEEL LIKE I KNOW HIM?

SEE? SEE HOW THE HOLY BURNING LIGHT OF HEAVEN DISPELS THE DARKNESS?

NOW YOU, HELLSPAWN.

I'LL MAKE YOU SCREAM.

WHAT THE HELL'S GOIN' ON DOWN THERE IN *SIMMONSVILLE*?.

I DON'T RIGHTLY KNOW, MAJOR VALE, SIR.

WE GOT ALARMS GOING OFF ALL OVER THE PLACE. WE'VE HAD TO PLACE AN EMERGENCY EXCLUSION ZONE AROUND THE WHOLE AREA.

WYNN'S VANISHED AND NOBODY KNOWS HOW OR WHERE.

I JUST *GOT* HERE, SOLDIER, AND ALREADY IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE THIS PROJECT'S FALLING APART AT THE SEAMS.

WYNN SAID THAT WAS A DOORWAY TO HELL DOWN THERE.

LOOKS TO ME LIKE ALL HELL JUST BROKE LOOSE, BOY.

WELL, THIS PROGRAM MEANS *WAY* TOO MUCH TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO JUST LET IT ALL GO CRAZY. I'M GOIN' *IN* THERE, EXCLUSION ZONE OR NO GODDAMN EXCLUSION ZONE!

AND THERE AIN'T NOTHING ON EARTH *OR* IN HELL GONNA STOP *ME*, THAT'S FOR SURE!

I CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS.

GOT TO TRY AND TAKE HIM OUT.

SHRAAAK!

GODDAMN! I MISSED!

I MISSED AND HE'S STILL COMING.

THE NEXT BLAST WILL KILL ME.

GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE.

A SWITCH SNAPS HOME IN MY BRAIN AND I DISSOLVE MY BODY.

EVERYTHING FALLS INWARD, LIKE A COLLAPSING BALLOON. THE WORLD BREAKS UP AND GOES OUT.

AND I'M TRAVELLING.

A SHOTGUN BLAST THROUGH UN-SPACE AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT. STRESSED MOLECULES SHRIEKING WITH SHOCK.

I'M NEVER GONNA BELIEVE ANYTHING I SEE ON 'STAR TREK' AGAIN; TELEPORTATION HURTS.

IT HURTS BAD.

AND, AS BEFORE, THE SPAWN IS DRAWN BACK, AS THOUGH BY SOME PSYCHIC MAGNET, TO THE LABYRINTHINE ALLEYWAYS OF THE **BOWERY**...

SO I SAYS TO THE COP, I SAYS... *HEY!* LOOKIT THIS *HERE!*

WHATCHA CALL THAT?!

JEE-ZUS! IT'S THE FOURTH OF JULY!

...TO THE PLACE HE CALLS **HOME**.

GET AWAY... ALL OF YOU... HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO **FOLLOW**...

GET AWAY!

IT'S THE *SPAWN!*

YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD, BIG GUY...

NO!

GET **OUT** OF HERE!

GO!

IT CAN'T BE... HE CAN'T HAVE COME AFTER ME SO SOON.

I NEED MORE TIME...

YOU CAN'T HIDE.

I CAN TRACK YOU THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!

THERE'S NOWHERE TO RUN FROM DEATH!

SKRAAAK

CAN'T SEE STRAIGHT... EVERYTHING BROKEN UP INSIDE. IS THAT BLOOD IN MY EYES, OR...

...JESUS, THAT NOISE... IT'S MY COSTUME! BLEEDING... MOANING...

MY COSTUME'S ALIVE AND HE'S WOUNDED IT...

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THE *PAIN*? *BURNING* INSIDE... WHITE *FIRE*... THEY SET *LIGHT* TO MY SOUL...

IF I *KILL YOU*, THE ANGELS WILL LET ME *REST*.

ANGELS? WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

I'M LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS.

CAN'T TAKE ANOTHER...

SHRRZZZ

UUUUHHHH H

HEAD'S FILLED WITH *LIGHT*... I CAN'T *THINK* STRAIGHT... I *JUST HAVE TO* KILL YOU...

THEN THE FIRES WILL GO *OUT*. I WAS A MAN ONCE... ***WAS*** I A MAN? NOW I'M THE FIERY SOLDIER OF HEAVEN... HEAVEN'S HUNTER, HEAVEN'S HARRIER AND *YOU*...

YOU'RE JUST **PREY!**

SHING!

TIME'S UP, HELLSPAWN!

ON THE STREET THEY CALL HIM DIPPER.

NO.

THIS AIN'T RIGHT.

HE WASN'T ALWAYS DIPPER; HE USED TO BE SOMEONE ELSE.

MARTY. THAT WAS IT. MARTY SLADEK.

PRIVATE MARTY SLADEK. KHE SANH. '69.

'YOU GOTTA WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BUDDIES.' THAT WAS THE RULE IN 'NAM.

ONLY ONE TIME, HE DIDN'T...

HE STILL DREAMS ABOUT IT-- THE HOT WIND LIKE A PUNCH IN THE GUT AND THE FLYING CHUNKS OF WET MEAT THAT USED TO BE MEN.

HE'D FELT THAT SAME DEVIL'S WIND AGAIN WHEN THE SHINING GUY TOOK OUT THE SPAWN. JUST MOMENTS AGO.

WHAT'S A GUY TO DO?

WHAT'S A GUY TO DO WHEN HE'S SEEN HIS BEST BUDDIES TURNED INTO EXHIBITS FROM A MUSEUM OF HORRORS?

THEY ROTATED MARTY BACK TO THE WORLD BUT IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE ANY MORE. HE JUST KEPT DRINKING AND DRINKING UNTIL HE FORGOT WHY HE EVER STARTED.

BUT NOW IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN.

THE SPAWN GUY TURNED UP OUT OF NOWHERE WITH SOME SUPER-CRAZY 'ON HIS TAIL. HE WAS BEATEN, WIPED-OUT, AND NOBODY SEEMED ABLE TO DO ANY-THING TO HELP.

'YOU GOTTA WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BUDDIES.' THAT WAS THE RULE.

IT AIN'T RIGHT WE SHOULD JUST STAND HERE.

IT JUST AIN'T RIGHT.

BUT THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.

AND THIS IS NOW.

SEE, HELLSPAWN?

IT'S EASY TO DIE.

I PROMISE TO MAKE IT *HURT.*

SHA-ANG

YOU GOTTA WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BUDDIES.

WHO...?

FILTH!

I'LL BURN YOUR *EYES* OUT! I'LL--

I DON'T THINK SO, PAL.

THIS IS *OUR* TURF AND WE STICK TOGETHER.

YOU GOT A BEEF WITH THE SPAWN YOU GOT A BEEF WITH *ALL* OF US.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE FACING...

I'LL TEAR YOU ALL APART...

THAT'S ENOUGH, BUD.

THESE PEOPLE ARE UNDER **MY** PROTECTION.

GOT THAT?

KRO-OM

SHRAAAAK!

MY COSTUME HOWLS AS HE TAGS ME WITH ANOTHER BLAST.

GOT TO MOVE IN FAST.

I'M STILL WEAK.

I CAN'T AFFORD TO LET HIM GAIN THE ADVANTAGE AGAIN.

YOU THINK YOU CAN HURT *ME*-- HEAVEN'S SOLDIER?

I'LL SHOW YOU *PAIN*.

THIS IS WHAT *I* FEEL.

NNNGH

RRRRAAAA

FEELS LIKE LIVE WIRES... BURNING LIGHTS IN MY HEAD... JESUS; DON'T LET ME PASS OUT...

WHOK!

WHUNCH!

IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S EXPENDED TOO MUCH ENERGY. MAYBE HIS POWERS ARE SIMILAR TO MINE.

NO TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT NOW. I HAVE TO FINISH THIS.

I'LL KILL YOU...

YEAH?

WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD, BASTARD!

HAVE A NICE DAY.

TSCHH!

AAAAHHHHH

I'LL KILL YOU... I'LL KILL YOU...

TELL ME ABOUT IT.

I THINK I GOT HIM.

I *HIT* HIM. SCARED THE CRAP OUTTA ME BUT I HIT HIM.

YOU GOTTA WATCH OUT FOR YOUR BUDDIES, RIGHT?

SURE, DIPPER.

DID I DO THE RIGHT THING?

YOU DID THE RIGHT THING, BUDDY.

JEEZ! WHAT'S HE DOIN' NOW?

DISAPPEARED. LOOK AT THAT.

WELL, I'LL BE *DAMNED*.

I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND IT.

HIGH ABOVE THE EARTH ORBITS THE ANGEL STATION, SOURCE OF THE ANTI-SPAWN'S HEAVENLY POWER...

CONTROL MAY SEE THIS AS A FAILURE ON OUR PART.

IT WAS A FIRST TEST RUN, NOTHING MORE. THE HELLSPAWN IS STRONGER AND MORE RESOURCEFUL THAN WE HAD THOUGHT.

WE MUST INCREASE OUR SOLDIER'S POWER LEVELS AND PREPARE HIM MORE THOROUGHLY FOR FUTURE ENCOUNTERS.

RELEASE ME... PLEASE... I'M BURNING INSIDE... KILL ME...

MORE ELEMENTAL FIRE!

NO MORE! PLEASE!

NOOOO

I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL THAT WAS ALL ABOUT BUT I HOPE IT'S OVER...

WELL, I HEARD YOU COULD BE PRETTY DUMB BUT GIMME A BREAK! OVER?

YOU THINK HEAVEN GOES TO ALL THE TROUBLE OF EMPOWERING AN *ANTI-SPAWN* JUST TO HAVE IT BEATEN IN ONE LITTLE SCUFFLE?

AN ANTI-SPAWN?

LOOK, WHO ARE YOU? DIDN'T I SEE YOU EARLIER?

SURE DID. YOU EVEN SAVED MY LIFE, ALTHOUGH, TO TELL THE TRUTH, IT DIDN'T NEED SAVING.

WE'VE BEEN *WATCHING* YOU, SIMMONS. I BELIEVE YOU MET ONE OF US BEFORE, A MAN NAMED *CAGLIOSTRO.**

*SEE ISSUE #9 -- Tom

YOU SEE, HEAVEN AND HELL AIN'T THE *ONLY* PLAYERS IN THIS GAME.

THERE ARE *OTHER* POWERS AND AGENCIES, OWING ALLEGIANCE TO NEITHER SIDE, AND THERE ARE METHODS WHEREBY YOU CAN *UNDO* THE BARGAIN YOU MADE *AND* RETAIN YOUR POWERS.

BELIEVE ME, YOU *CAN* BEAT THE DEVIL.

WHO ARE YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME?

MY CARD.

BUT... BUT IT'S BLANK.

ONLY FOR NOW.

WHEN THE TIME COMES, WE'LL BE IN *TOUCH*.

MORE QUESTIONS.

FOR ANOTHER DAY.

RIGHT NOW, THERE'S SOMETHING I STILL HAVE TO DO.

HERE IN THE NEVADA DESERT, THERE'S A DOORWAY TO HELL. IT LOOKS LIKE A TOWN BUT IT'S MADE OUT OF SOMETHING CALLED PSYCHOPLASM-- A SUBSTANCE WHICH CHANGES SHAPE IN RESPONSE TO THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS.

THEY TOOK MY MEMORIES AND USED THEM TO GIVE FORM TO THIS TERRIBLE PLACE.

THEY TOOK EVERYTHING I WAS AND PERVERTED IT.

NOW I'M TAKIN' IT BACK.

CHAKK

KA-CHAKK

WHOOOM

ONLY WAY I KNOW HOW.

YOU THERE!

STOP RIGHT THERE!

TURN AROUND! *SHOW* YOURSELF, GODDAMNIT!

Oh GOD.

WHO *ARE* YOU?...

WELL, WELL. YOU WON'T REMEMBER ME BUT I REMEMBER YOU, MAJOR VALE. YOU AND JASON WYNN WERE CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH. WEREN'T YOU?

REMEMBER ECUADOR? SIX GOOD MEN DIED. A WHOLE VILLAGE OF INNOCENT PEOPLE WAS WIPED OUT AND YOU AND JASON COVERED THE WHOLE THING UP.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT? THAT WAS A COVERT OPERATION. WHO THE HELL ARE YOU, MISTER?

ANSWER ME! THAT'S AN *ORDER!*

MAYBE I GOT SICK OF TAKING ORDERS FROM PEOPLE LIKE YOU, VALE.

NOW I'M GIVING YOU AN ORDER.

DROP DEAD.

I WISH I COULD SAY IT MAKES ME FEEL BETTER.

TIME TO FINISH THE JOB.

I WATCH IT ALL COME DOWN. I WATCH IT ALL BURN; THE HOUSE I GREW UP IN, THE BAR I DRANK IN, THE PARK AND THE SCHOOL AND UNCLE MARTIN'S STORE.

MY LIFE GOES UP IN FLAMES.

EVERYTHING THAT WAS HUMAN IS GONE.

EXCEPT FOR ONE THING.

ONE MEMORY OF A PERFECT DAY REMAINS AS I STAND IN THE BLAZING RUINS.

THE MEMORY OF A SUNLIT SPRING DAY ON THE LAKE. THE DAY I ASKED WANDA TO MARRY ME.

BEST DAY OF MY LIFE.

I TAKE THAT LAST MEMORY AND REDUCE IT DOWN TO A SINGLE SPARK.

THAT WAS THE BEST DAY, BEST THING I EVER DID. IT'S WORTH KEEPING BUT I'D ONLY BREAK IT OR LOSE IT.

I USE MY MIND TO COLLAPSE THE ENTIRE SCENE, SHAPING THE PSYCHOPLASM INTO A MORE MANAGEABLE FORM.

GUESS I SHOULD PUT IT SOMEWHERE SAFE.

QUEENS, NEW YORK.

LOOK AT THAT *RAIN!*

YEAH, IT'S A HELL OF A NIGHT, WANDA.

ARE YOU *OKAY?* YOU SEEM KIND OF RESTLESS OR SOME-THING.

I DON'T KNOW. JUST *THINKING...*

WE'RE SO *LUCKY*, AREN'T WE, TERRY? WE'VE GOT EVERYTHING WE EVER WANTED.

I JUST FEEL SORRY FOR ANY POOR THING THAT HAS TO BE *OUT* THERE.

WANDA.

I SAVED IT FOR YOU.

...IT JUST SEEMS...

OH.

WANDA?

I JUST...

SOMETHING JUST CAME INTO MY HEAD. I SEEMED TO REMEMBER SOMETHING... AND THEN IT WAS GONE...

IT WAS...

I LOVE YOU.

CLOSE THE DRAPES, HONEY.

COME TO BED.

THE WINDOW GOES DARK.

THE WORLD GOES DARK.

BUT THAT'S OKAY. I'M USED TO IT.

DARKNESS IS MY HOME NOW.

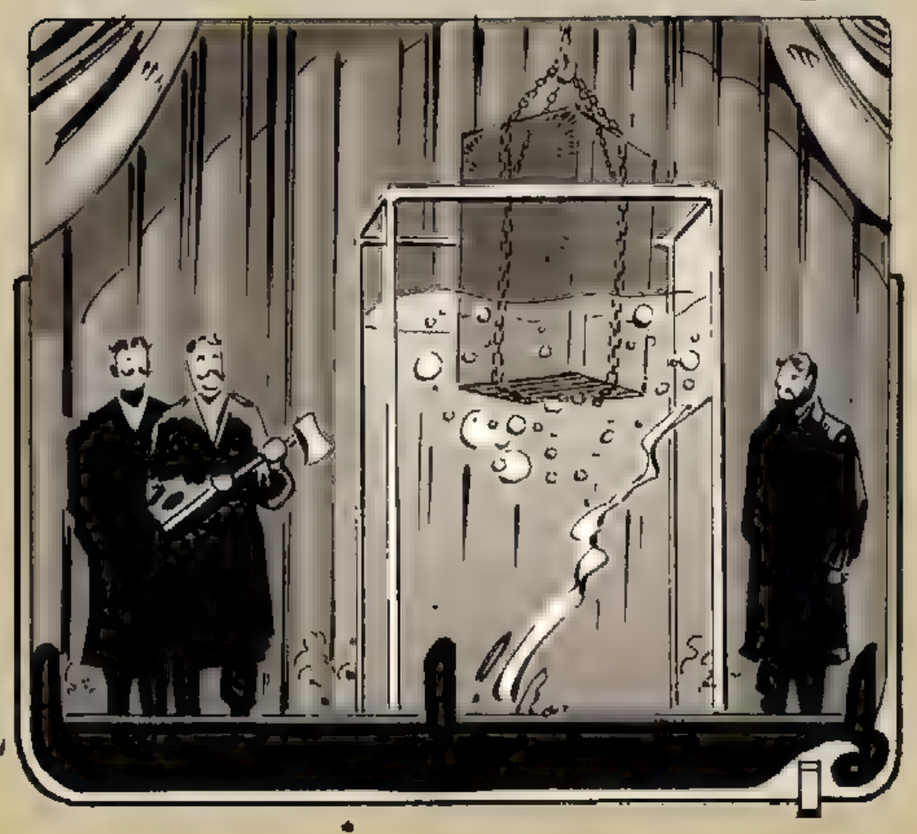
1993

ISSUE 19

SUNDAY INDEPENDENT LOS ANGELES

FIVE CENTS NOVEMBER 5 1916

HOUDINI ASTOUNDS CAPACITY AU
DEFIES 10 HANDCUFFS & STRAITJ
CONCERNED POLICE ATTENTIVE



S

"THEY'VE *DONE* IT! THEY'VE BRIDGED THE *ABYSS!*

"WE'RE *DEFINITELY* REGISTERING INFERNAL MATTER, SIR-- IT'S *UNMISTAKABLE!*"

"A PITY THERE WASN'T THE TIME TO SET UP ANY CONTROLS, OR SUFFICIENT MEASUREMENT SCHEMES. WE ARE FORTUNATE THAT YOU DISCOVERED THIS EVENT WINDOW AT ALL.

"NOW, THE BOMB. I AM GLAD THESE EARTHIANS FOUND A SECOND ONE NECESSARY.

"THIS ATOMIC EVENT MAY TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF MUNDANE HIGH-ENERGY PARTICLE BOMBARDMENT ON INFERNAL MATTER. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN DETERMINED THAT NEITHER BLAST FORCE NOR HEAT CAN FAZE A HELL-CREATURE."

PERHAPS WE HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THE POTENCY OF THIS BLAST, AND ITS FEEDBACK TO OUR MONITORS. WHO COULD HAVE ANTICIPATED THAT THIS ENERGY RELEASE WOULD BE OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE TO US, ON OUR PLANAR LEVEL?

I WAS *RIGHT!* WE'RE NO LONGER *REGISTERING* THE INFERNAL MATTER!

BUT WHERE DID THE HELL-CREATURE GO?

THIS MERITS FURTHER INVESTIGATION, BUT IT IS OF NO REAL URGENCY. %A9, SEE TO IT.

SOMEWHERE IN THE SOVIET UNION, SEVERAL YEARS AGO...

"STEADY.

"CLOSER. THERE'S YOUSEF VOLOKHOV.

"INHALE.

"HOLD IT."

JUST SQUEEZE...

BUT INSTEAD...

...THERE'S NO TIME TO MAKE THE SHOT.

SPAK SPAK SPAK SPAK SPAK SPAK

JEE-ZUS!

MOVE IT, SIMMONS!

"MOVE IT!

"MOVE!

SPAK

SPAK

"MOVE!

BRRRP

BRRRP

BRRRP

"MOVE!

"MOVE!

"MOVE!

"MOVE!

KRACH!

"INSIDE! NOW!"

KLIK

THE BOWERY, NEW YORK CITY. 5:10 A.M.

squee

squee

squee

KLIK

Ohhh... NIGHTMARE...

EH?

THAT WASN'T THERE WHEN I WENT TO SL--

BUH-TAAASSH!

ROAR!!

!!

BUT IT WAS JUST A PILE OF RAGS! BUMS DON'T DRESS IN THOSE COLORS!

GOD

GOD

GOD

GOD

GOD

YOU'RE MEAT!

FFOOP

ULGK!

WE NEED TO TALK, HELL'S-PAWN.

I CAN'T LET HIM GET AWAY! HE BLEW ME UP!

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I SNARED HIS WALLET, AND WE CAN FIND HIM LATER. FOR NOW, WE HAVE MORE PRESSING MATTERS TO DISCUSS.

GRAB RANDOM PIECES FROM ALL OVER THE EARTH AND THROW THEM TOGETHER ON A SMALL ISLAND. THIS GIVES YOU **MANHATTAN**, AND MAKES IT THE GREATEST CITY IN THE WORLD.

THE BOWERY SLAPS AGAINST GREENWICH VILLAGE, WHICH BORDERS CHINATOWN AND LITTLE ITALY. HALF AN HOUR'S DRIVE UPTOWN ONE FINDS LITTLE **UKRAINE**, SANDWICHED BETWEEN CENTRAL PARK WEST AND HARLEM. SOME OF THE SHOPS THERE HAVE BILINGUAL SIGNS BECAUSE SOME OF THE LOCALS HAVE A BETTER GRASP OF **CYRILLIC**.

IT'S A PERFECT NEIGHBORHOOD. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF **GOSSIP**.

TOPIC THIS EARLY MORNING: **PORSCHE MacNEILL**.

〈HERE COMES THAT LAZY KID AGAIN.*〉

〈TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD. BIG SHOT HAS HIS OWN APARTMENT DOWNTOWN, BUT STILL HE BRINGS HIS DIRTY SOCKS HOME TO MOMMA.〉

〈WHEN I WAS HIS AGE, I STAYED AROUND AND **SUPPORTED** MY MOTHER AND FAMILY.〉

〈NO RESPECT FOR ANYONE, THAT KID.〉

*TRANSLATED FROM UKRANIAN.

〈THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS, YOU MARRY OUT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD. YOUR CHILDREN ARE BUMS.〉

〈FEH, THAT SCOT.〉

〈AND SPEAKING OF JOBS...〉

〈AT LEAST THE KID HAS A GOOD JOB, IN ELECTRONICS.〉

〈...I'D BETTER BE GETTING TO THE AIRPORT. AN OLD **FRIEND** CALLED TO SAY THAT HE'S COMING IN, AND HIS LUGGAGE NEEDS SPECIAL CARE.〉

...FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, NUCLEAR TECHNICIANS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC NATIONS WILL BE MEETING WITH THEIR GLOBAL COUNTERPARTS IN AN INFORMAL SETTING. THE THREE-DAY CONFERENCE, WHICH OPENS TOMORROW AT NEW YORK'S COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, HAS BEEN HAILED AS YET ANOTHER SIGN THAT THE COLD WAR HAS ENDED.

CNN

...AND IF YOU ASK *ME*, POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES ASIDE, THESE GENTLEMEN NEED SOME *SERIOUS* FASHION ADVICE. FIRST TIME TO TOWN, FARMBOYS? I THINK MY GRANDFATHER WAS *BURIED* IN ONE OF THOSE SUITS. I HAVE A WORD OF ENGLISH THEY SHOULD ALL TAKE THE TIME TO LEARN: *ARMANI!*

E

ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

...SO WHY IS IT THAT THESE GUYS FLEW *SIX THOUSAND MILES* TO BE TALKING ABOUT *A-BOMBS?* WE'RE NEVER GONNA *USE* THE DAMN THINGS. THIS IS ALL *PHOTO-OPPORTUNITY!* THE RANK AND FILE FOLKS OF THE UKRAINE ARE UP AGAINST OPPRESSIVE *UNEMPLOYMENT* AND HORRIBLE *INFLATION*. WHAT'S WORSE, THEY HAVE A RAMPANT PLAGUE OF *GANGSTER* ACTIVITY! WHY TALK ABOUT NUKES WHEN YOUR COUNTRY'S COURTING CERTAIN ECONOMIC *COLLAPSE?* IF THEY HAD ANY SENSE THEY'D *KEEP ON* SELLING US THEIR BOMBS INSTEAD OF SENDING THESE USELESS *HAS-BEENS* TO TALK ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS. MAKES ME MISS THE COLD WAR. GET A NEW LIFE, GUYS.

5

TALKBACK

HAULING LUGGAGE. ALWAYS LUGGAGE. THIRTY-ONE YEARS AGO, **ANDREI ZLENKO** LEFT HIS UKRANIAN HOMELAND ON A TEMPORARY VISA, CARRYING WHAT LITTLE HE OWNED IN SHABBY SUITCASES. EVERY DAY, AT HIS JOB, HE IS REMINDED OF THAT EVENT. HE WONDERS IF HE WILL STILL BE CARRYING LUGGAGE IN THE AFTERLIFE.

AT THE TIME HE LEFT, HE'D HAD NO INTENTION OF RETURNING TO THE OLD COUNTRY. NOW, HE SOMETIMES FINDS HIMSELF LOOKING WHISTFULLY BACK ON THOSE SIMPLER DAYS... UNTIL HE REMEMBERS THE **SECRET POLICE.**

THAT MEMORY HAS BECOME MORE VIVID JUST NOW. HE RECOGNIZES THE CHEAP LUGGAGE, THE NAMES OF THE RUSSIAN CITIES ON THE TRAVEL STICKERS... AND THE WATCHFUL EYES. HIS OLD NEIGHBOR **YOUSEF'S** CONSPICUOUSLY STURDY CARRYING CASE SLIDES INTO VIEW.

THE UNIFORM OF HIS OVERSEER IS DIFFERENT, YET STILL A UNIFORM. DAMNED THUGS. A MAN CAN RISK ALL TO TRANSPORT HIMSELF TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD...

... AND THE WORST OF THE OLD LIFE CAN FIND A WAY TO **FOLLOW.**

INSPECTED BY UNITED STATES CUSTOMS

NO MATTER. THE OVERSEER IS JUST A FORMALITY. YOUSEF IS AN OLD FRIEND, AND THAT FRIENDSHIP IS WORTH AT LEAST THIS SMALL FAVOR.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. IT IS LATE ON A SATURDAY EVENING, THE SECOND DAY OF THE "EAST-WEST ATOMIC WARFARE, SCIENCE AND APPLICATIONS CONFERENCE."

SEVERAL SPEAKERS FROM THE EASTERN BLOC DECIDE TO SAMPLE THE REAL AMERICA -- ONE THAT DECADES OF SOVIET PROPOGANDA HAD BURNED INTO THEIR MINDS.

FAR FROM A WARNING, IT HAS BECOME A BEACON -- AN *IDEAL*.

〈GENTLEMEN, WE HAVE ARRIVED.*〉

〈A TRULY MAGNIFICENT RESULT OF A FREE SOCIETY.〉

〈A TRULY MAGNIFICENT RESULT OF BREEDING, TOO.〉

〈LET US GO INSIDE AND DRINK.〉

XXX PEEP SHOWS 25¢

TOW AWAY ZONE

TAXI

LIVE SEX SH

LIVE

*TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN.

〈YOU KNOW, IT IS SUCH A SHAME THAT OUR SCIENCE WILL NEVER BE PUT TO PRACTICAL USE.〉

〈YES, OURS IS A DYING PROFESSION. WHAT GOOD IS IT TO KNOW HOW TO DESTROY THE EARTH, IF WE NEVER GET THE CHANCE?〉

〈I DON'T KNOW. PERHAPS THERE WILL YET BE A USE FOR OUR KNOWLEDGE. CHEER UP!〉

SEVERAL ROUNDS LATER...

〈ANY SPY WORTH HIS METTLE WOULD LOVE OUR **FUSION** DATA. JUST TODAY I WAS SPEAKING WITH A COLLEAGUE FROM **ISRAEL**...〉

〈THEIR BOMBS ARE **QUITE** EFFICIENT. A SHAME THAT THEY MUST KEEP IT **SECRET.**〉

〈 I STILL PREFER THE OLD, TRIED AND TRUE **ATOMICS**. THEY'RE SO EASY TO JUST DISMANTLE, PICK UP AND **TAKE ANYWHERE** WITH YOU.〉

〈DID ANY OF YOU MEET **KHADAFY'S** ENVOY? NOW **THERE** IS A MAN COULD MAKE US ALL VERY WEALTHY, I BET!〉

PHONE

〈 THIS IS MISHA. GET ME STATION CHIEF IVANOV. **NOW.**〉

〈Oh MAMA!〉

〈 YOU WERE RIGHT. LOUD, CRAZY TALK GOT **ONE** OF OUR KGB SHADOWS OUT OF THE WAY, AND NOW THE OTHER'S DISTRACTED.〉

〈LET'S HEAD FOR THE EXIT!〉

〈IDIOT! I LEAVE FOR A MOMENT AND THEY SLIP **AWAY!**〉

EXIT

〈I'LL TRY TO NAB THEM! YOU CALL IT IN, THIS TIME!〉

〈I WILL SEE YOU BACK AT THE CONFERENCE TOMORROW.〉

〈BUT YOUSEF, THERE ARE MORE BARS TO VISIT. WHERE ARE YOU GOING?〉

〈TO SEE MY EXPATRIATE FRIENDS!〉

LITTLE UKE COMING UP.

ELSEWHEN/WHERE:

THE PLACE IS KNOWN AS **THE OVERLAP.** IT IS A REALITY THAT INTERSECTS ALL PLANES OF EXISTENCE. IT IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF WHAT'S CALLED **MAGIC.**

THERE ARE NO SPIRITUAL OR PHYSICAL LAWS HERE. REALITY IS ELASTIC HERE.

THE REALM IS INHABITED BY POWERFUL BEINGS FROM A MILLION MILLION WORLDS, AS WELL AS FLORA, FAUNA AND TERRAIN FROM THOSE PLACES, ALL SCATTERED HAPHAZARDLY ACROSS AN INFINITE BACKDROP.

EACH DENIZEN HAS HIS/HER/ITS OWN PRIORITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS. THE OVERLAP IS PRIMARILY A PLACE OF **DISCOVERY** AND **EXPERIMENTATION**-- A LABORATORY WITHOUT BOUNDS.

ONE SUCH GROUP IS MEETING **NOW** TO DISCUSS THEIR CURRENT FORAY INTO HUMAN SPIRITUAL SPACE-- AND THE PHYSICS OF **HELL.**

THANKS FOR COMING. I COULDN'T BE MORE *EXCITED*, NOW THAT THINGS ARE *MOVING!*

I'VE BEEN KEEPING AN EYE ON THOSE EARTHIANS AND THEIR *ATOMIC* FETISH--AND THEY HAVEN'T ALL *KILLED* EACH OTHER YET! SO, I'VE MANAGED TO PUSH THINGS IN A DIRECTION THAT'LL GIVE US SOME *ANSWERS* SOON.

OUR LAST SURVEY--WHERE A HELL-CREATURE WAS BLOWN UP--WAS A *BUST*, BUT THAT'S OKAY. WE WEREN'T PREPARED FOR THAT EVENT THE WAY WE ARE *NOW*.

THIS TIME, I PLUGGED A *THOUGHT-PROGRAM* INTO A SCIENTIST THERE. HE'LL DETONATE AN ATOM BOMB AT A PRE-SET TIME. A DEMON, THE *LATEST* HELL'S-PAWN WILL BE NEAR GROUND ZERO.

WE'VE PLACED AN *AGENT* THERE WHO'LL MAKE SURE THAT THE CREATURE'S *IN PLACE*. WE KNOW THE STRENGTH OF THE BLAST, SO WE'VE TAKEN *VIEWING* PRECAUTIONS.

SO NOW--OUR *CONCLUSIVE* TEST TO DETERMINE IF ATOMICS CAN *KILL* DEMONS, AND IN THE PROCESS *SCATTER* THEIR INFERNAL MATTER!

AND THE BEST PART IS, THAT PERSNICKETY PEST *HOUDINI* IS THE AGENT ON THE SCENE! WE CLEAR UP *TWO* PROBLEMS AT *ONCE!*

AM I GOOD, OR *WHAT?*

*I TRUST THAT THE PEST WILL VERIFY THE NATURE OF THE HELL-CREATURE'S POWERS AND TEMPERMENT **FIRST**. THAT WILL BE USEFUL INFORMATION SHOULD WE DECIDE TO WORK ON HELL IN THE FUTURE. THE PLACE IS RIPE FOR MANIPULATION.*

HOUDINI IS USING ONE OF OUR PORTAL DEVICES. I TOLD HIM IT IS MORE EFFICIENT A TRANSPORT THAN MEDITATION, OR WHATEVER HIS USUAL METHOD. IN HIS CONFUSION OVER THE FAILURE OF OUR DEVICE, HE WILL NOT HAVE TIME TO ADJUST TO HIS NORMAL MODE OF TRANSFER, AND WILL PERISH.

BRILLIANT!

*Hmm... BUT HE **ALWAYS** ESCAPES...*

LITTLE UKRAINE, TOWARD MIDNIGHT.

EXCUSE ME, PLEASE... ANDREI ZLENKO IS...?

Huh?

SONY

I LOOK FOR ANDREI ZLENKO.

NO MANNERS.

Oh, YEAH. TRY 301. BUT IT'S PAST THE OLD MAN'S BEDTIME, I THINK.

GREENWICH VILLAGE, HALF AN HOUR LATER...

RADIO HUT

IBM APPLE

40% OFF POWER PC

I GOTTA GET OUTTA THIS RUT. MY LIFE, IN THREE WORDS, WOULD BE: BORING. UNDER-TASKED. ASSISTANT MANAGER.

MAKE THAT FOUR WORDS.

LUU-CY! I'M HO-OME!

COMPAQ

EMPLOYEES ONLY

SONY

FOR ONCE, IT'S A GOOD THING THE CLEANING SERVICE IS ON STRIKE.

...SO CHECK THIS OUT: LAST NIGHT I SET OFF ANOTHER ONE OF MY BEAUTS, BUT SOME DUDE CHASED ME. HE WAS ALL ON FIRE AN' *SCREAMIN'*! IT WAS *COOL*!

I BET YOU WET YOUR PANTS, BUDDY.

NOT *EVEN*! BUT WHATEVER IT TAKES, I'LL GET *RID* OF THOSE BUMS BY MY PLACE.

WHAT ABOUT THE BUMS BY YOUR *MA'S* PLACE? THAT'S WHERE YOU HANG OUT ALL THE TIME!

BITE ME. ANYWAY, I GOTTA GET BACK TO WORK HERE. THIS NEXT ONE IS GONNA BE *BRIGHT*.

THERE'S NO WAY I'M GOING TO BELIEVE YOU'RE HARRY HOUDINI.

WELL... *YOU'RE* A DEMON FROM *HELL*...!

AREN'T YOU DEAD OR SOMETHING?

AREN'T *YOU*?

I GET YOUR POINT. BUT THIS IS PRETTY HARD TO BELIEVE...

WHICH *PART*? THAT *I'M* A DIMENSION-TRAVELLING HYPER-MAGE TEN THOUSAND TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN MY STAGE ACT LET ON, OR THAT *YOU'RE* AN INVULNERABLE, ULTRASTRONG, HORRIBLE PUPPET OF *HELL*?

BOTH, I GUESS.

GOOD-- I'VE TWEAKED HIS CURIOSITY.

HOWEVER, I DIDN'T COME HERE TO DISCUSS OUR MUTUALLY UNBELIEVABLE CONDITIONS... I'M HERE TO SPEAK ABOUT *YOU*, HELL'S-PAWN... AND ABOUT YOUR *POWERS*.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MY POWERS? YOU'RE JUST AN ESCAPE ARTIST.

JUST AN ESCAPE ARTIST? *JUST* AN ESCAPE ARTIST?! ARE YOU AWARE OF HOW MANY YEARS I'VE SPENT, NON-MAGICAL, GRUELING YEARS, LEARNING TO BE *JUST* AN ESCAPE ARTIST?!

AS IT TURNED OUT, THOSE LEVELS OF CONCENTRATION LED TO MY ACCIDENTAL EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL DISCOVERIES... THINGS BEYOND HOCUS-POCUS AND MERE SPIRITUALISM.

THAT WAS *MAGIC*-- THAT I MOVED FROM POINT "A" TO POINT "B" IN A NON-MUNDANE MANNER. IT WAS THE *RESULT*, NOT THE *METHOD* THAT MATTERED.

SO WHAT DID YOU SEE? AN ILLUSION? A SMOKE PELLET? TELEPORTATION?

DOES IT MATTER?

NOW I KNOW MAGIC. *REAL* MAGIC.

foop

MAGIC IS ABOUT PERCEPTION AND THE WILL'S ABILITY TO *ALTER* THAT PERCEPTION, USING ENERGIES GATHERED FROM BEYOND THIS WORLD.

MAGIC IS LIKE TELLING A LIE SO CONVINCING THAT EVEN THE *UNIVERSE* BELIEVES YOU! AND *YOU*, MY FRIEND, ARE A CREATURE OF MAGIC, ALBEIT OF FINITE POWER. HOWEVER, YOU NEEDN'T EXHAUST *YOUR* POWER...

...THAT SYMBIOTIC COSTUME CAN DO MUCH OF YOUR WORK *FOR* YOU.

GOOD GOD! QUICK-- *BEHIND* YOU!

KLSSSKKKKK

YOU SEE? WITH ONLY A THOUGHT, YOUR *SUIT* ATTACKS FOR YOU. IT EXPENDS *ITS* ENERGY, NOT YOURS.

SKRAK!

NOW, IN THE CASE OF THIS *BOMB*...

...THE SUIT APPRECIATED THE THREAT AND ACTED TO KEEP YOU FROM HARM, WITHOUT YOUR CONSCIOUS DIRECTION. *YOUR* ENERGY EXPENDITURE? NONE.

AND THERE'S MORE.

YOUR MOST IMPORTANT POWER, AS A CREATURE OF SORCERY, IS *MANIFESTATION*. WITH A CLEAR HEAD AND A STRONG WILL YOU CAN CAUSE YOUR COSTUME TO MAKE JUST ABOUT ANYTHING, PROVIDED YOU UNDERSTAND ITS ESSENCE...

...ITS SIZE, THE WEIGHT, THE COLOR-- THAT SORT OF THING.

FOR EXAMPLE, THINK OF SOMETHING SMALL, LIKE A *MARBLE*.

YOU KNOW WHAT IT FEELS LIKE, LOOKS LIKE AND ALL. NOW FEEL YOUR DESIRE FOR SUCCESS FADE TO ***SURENESS***. YOU ***WILL*** SUCCEED. LET THIS WILLPOWER ACTIVATE YOUR COSTUME. REACH OUT... THE MOLECULES ARE FLOATING FREE... GRAB THEM... THINK MARBLE ...GO ON...

...*MAKE* ONE!

A MARBLE...

OKAY...

Skop

PRETTY CLOSE... WE'LL TRY AGAIN...

LOOKIE HERE, FELLAS! WE GOTS US A REG-U-LAR *CIRCUS* ON OUR ROOF!

BRAINS, DIVVY... YOU AN' ME, WE TAKE THE RICH GUY IN THE *TUX*. LINK, TAKE THE *GEEK*.

YEAH... *heh heh*... YOU *SAID* IT, SMOKEY!

YEAH... heh heh. COME AN' **GET** ME.

LINK? Oh, PUH-LEEZ.

LINK, MEET CHAIN.

KLOK

CHAIN... LINK.

WHUFF

GOOMPH

BRAINS... DIVVY... SMOKEY...? LET YOUR NAMES SPEAK YOUR FATE.

AAAAA!

...

PUTTZZZ

HUHNHH...

WHAT THE DEVIL CAME OVER YOU?! YOU MUTILATED THOSE KIDS!

NOTHING OF THE SORT.

IT WAS A VISIBLE ILLUSION BASED ON THEIR LUDICROUS NICKNAMES. THEY'LL SNAP OUT OF IT SOON.

WHEREAS YOU, MY FRIEND, WERE POSITIVELY BRUTAL.

YOUR POWERS...

YEAH, MY POWERS. HOW IS IT THAT YOU AND EVERYONE ELSE I MEET KNOWS SO MUCH ABOUT ME-- AND I KNOW SQUAT?

YOU'D KNOW MORE ABOUT YOURSELF IF YOU'D TRY SOMETHING *NEW* EVERY NOW AND AGAIN.

YOUR ABILITIES ARE *VAST*, YET YOU'RE STILL THINKING LIKE A *MORTAL*.

WHAT ARE YOU THEN, HOTSHOT?

YES! I'VE *GOT* HIM!

UNLIKE YOU, I'M JUST HUMAN. WHEN AND WHERE I COME FROM, I PLAY THE ESCAPE ARTIST. PART OF MY TIME, THOUGH, IS SPENT IN THE HEART OF MAGIC, *THE OVERLAP*, WHERE I'M A PRANKSTER, AN ANNOYANCE. FOR *YOU*, I'M THE TICKET TO *KNOWLEDGE*.

AND SPEAKING OF TICKETS... I'M TAKING YOU TO A SHOW BEYOND YOUR WILDEST DREAMS.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
EAST-WEST ATOMIC CONF
THREE DAY
GENERAL ADMISSION

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESENTS THE EAST-WEST ATOMIC WARFARE SCIENCE & APPLICATION CONFERENCE
ALL THREE DAYS
GENERAL SEATING

FIRST THOUGH, YOU'LL NEED TO BE LESS CONSPICUOUS. PUT THIS ON, AND TONE THAT COSTUME DOWN, THERE'S A GOOD FELLOW.

EVER DRIVEN A *ROLLS* BEFORE?

AT THAT MOMENT, THREE STORIES BELOW...

...SPLATTER 'EM ALL WITH PAINT...

...WHY DON'T THOSE CREEPS JUST TAKE THE HINT AND LEAVE?

STICK AROUND, MY BOY, AND SOON YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO THIS WITH A FLICK OF THE WRIST--

AND THEN, BELOW...

IT'S THAT DAMN KID AGAIN!

ANNOYING WHELP.

THIS TIME, HE'S TOAST!

I'M GONNA NAIL THAT PUNK TO THE WALL WITH HIS OWN BONES!

I'M GONNA... I'M GONNA...!

DRIVE.

RIGHT BEHIND YOU, HELL'S-PAWN.

QUEENS, NEW YORK-- THE HOME OF SPAWN'S WIDOW, **WANDA BLAKE**, HER HUSBAND, TERRY FITZ-GERALD, AND THEIR DAUGHTER, **CYAN**.

ZKXZZZX

SLEEPY TALES

A BLISSFUL SUBURBAN SUNDAY MORNING, JUST MINUTES PAST FIVE...

RING

Huh- -COUGH- HELLO-- YEAH, PERCY, WHAT THE HECK-- ***NOW?!*** YEAH...

YES, I'VE GOT ALPHA-FIVE-ALPHA CLEARANCE... YOU'RE SERIOUS?

WHY COULDN'T THE K.G.B. HANDLE THIS?... Oh. THEY ***COULDN'T*** HANDLE IT. SO...

THREE GUYS CAME BACK, ONE GUY AT LARGE, SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? DO YOU SERIOUSLY THINK ANYONE WOULD BE ABLE TO SMUGGLE IN AN ***ATOMIC DEVICE?***...

YEAH, THE CUSTOMS CREW AT JFK AREN'T ALL THEY COULD BE... SO WHAT DO YOU WANT ***ME*** TO DO ABOUT IT?! PERCY, C'MON, MY JOB IS TO ***READ*** RUSSIAN, NOT ***SPEAK*** IT!...

DAMMIT, PERCY, I'M NO FIELD AGENT!... Oh, NOW I ***AM?*** YOU DON'T ***PAY*** ME FOR THAT!

ALL RIGHT -sigh- GIVE ME AN HOUR-- BUT ***YOU*** EXPLAIN IT TO MY WIFE.

SAME TO YOU 'BYE.

Whunh--?

IT'S A NEW SCHEDULE THING, HONEY. I HAVE TO WORK OVERTIME ***BEFORE*** MY SHIFT, THIS TIME.

GOTTA GO.

...DID HE SAY... ATOMIC DEVICE ...?

IN TWO WEEKS

ATOMIC DEVICE!

Ah, MY DEMONIC FRIEND, THERE ARE SO *MANY* THINGS TO TEACH YOU ABOUT MAGIC.

LIKE HOW THE HECK YOU'RE MAKING THIS CAR DEFY GRAVITY?

DEFY GRAVITY? *NONSENSE!* I'VE SIMPLY CONVINCED GRAVITY THAT THE CAR IS LIGHTER THAN AIR. WE'VE BECOME LIKE A DIRIGIBLE, PROPELLED BY OUR OWN EXHAUST.

YOU CAN'T ***DEFY*** A LAW OF PHYSICS. MAGIC WORKS ***WITH*** THE NATURAL WORLD, NOT AGAINST IT.

IT DOESN'T SOUND SO NATURAL TO ME.

THAT'S WHY ***I*** AM TEACHING ***YOU***.

WAIT! I SEE THE PUNK DOWN THERE!

*FOLLOWING HIS MURDER, AL SIMMONS WAS REBORN AS THE DEMONIC **SPAWN**. HE NOW FACES A WORLD THAT'S CHANGED IN UNEXPECTED WAYS... AND HIS OWN **NEW ABILITIES**, JUST AS UNEXPECTED AND MYSTERIOUS.*

THE LATE NIGHT SILENCE OF MANHATTAN'S LITTLE UKRAINE IS CUT BY THE ROAR OF THE BOMBER'S SPEEDING CAR.

UNKNOWN TO HIM, A DEMON AND HIS NEW-FOUND MENTOR ARE IN SILENT PURSUIT.

I WONDER WHO HE'S MEETING HERE.

MAN, THAT WAS THE BEST ONE YET!

GOTTA CATCH THE NEWS-- SEE IF I MADE IT THIS TIME!

HE'S GOTTA BE WORKING FOR THE MOB OR SOMEONE.

WHO CARES? WE CAN GET HIM LATER.

I'VE GOT TWO INVITES TO THE MAGICIANS' CLUB FOR SOME AFTER-HOURS FUN. ONE OF THEIR BOYS HAS A TRUNK OF MINE I'D LIKE TO LOOK IN ON. COMING?

THE HECK WITH THAT! I'M STICKING TO THIS KID LIKE GLUE!

SOMETHING'LL TURN UP.

SUIT YOURSELF. I'LL SEE YOU IN A FEW HOURS.

TIME PASSES SLOWLY... BUT WHEN HE WAS ALIVE AND A SOLDIER, AL SIMMONS WAS USED TO WAITING.

CYRILLIC WRITING ON THESE SIGNS... TAKES ME BACK.

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA... LANGUAGE IMMERSION SCHOOL. QUITE A FEW YEARS AGO. I DON'T KNOW HOW I GOT THROUGH IT.

GOOD THING I HAD A BUDDY'S PAPERS TO READ. THAT'S WHEN I MET--

--TERRY! THAT'S HIS VOICE DOWN THERE!

<EXCUSE ME PLEASE, GENTLEMEN. I AM SPECIAL AGENT FITZGERALD, WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. MAY I ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS?> *

WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?

*TRANSLATED FROM RUSSIAN.

Uh-oh-- TROUBLE!

<BUT OF COURSE. COME WITH US, PLEASE. IT IS WARMER INSIDE.>

<YOUR ACCENT NEEDS PRACTICE, LITTLE SPY. LET US TEACH YOU.>

HURGH!

SKAT SHH

LEAVE HIM ALONE!

KOK!

ULP!

KLNK NK

SPT SPT SPT SPT

THAT'S MY FRIEND!

IF IT WOULD HURT YOU MORE, I'D KILL YOU!

SPLAK!!

C'MON, TERRY, LET'S GO.

WHAT'S THIS SAY... YOUSEF VOLOKHOV... JEEZ! I ALMOST BAGGED HIM YEARS AGO!

WHAT'S HE GOT TO DO WITH THIS MESS?

SAYS HE'S HERE FOR SOME WEAPONS CONFERENCE AND WENT AWOL. BUT WHERE--

GO EASY THERE, TERRY. LEAN ON THIS CAR.

WHAAAT??

THAT'S VOLOKHOV IN FRONT OF THE PUNK'S BUILDING, OR I'M NOT DEAD!! I KNEW THIS THING STANK, BUT NOT THIS BAD!

NNNGGGHHH...

WHAT-EVER IT IS, THIS AGENT HAS GOT AN UNFINISHED DUTY TO EXECUTE!

...RUMOR HAS IT THAT OUR VISITING EASTERN EUROPEAN DIGNITARIES DID SOME DECIDEDLY *UN*DIGNIFIED CAROUSING LAST NIGHT, AND SHOWED UP AT *ALL* THE WRONG PARTIES. NEED A BROMO, COMRADES? SEEMS ONE OF YOUR PALS IS STILL OUT SLEEPING IT OFF.

ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

=ungh=

WHAT HIT ME? WHAT WAS *UP* WITH THOSE GUYS?

CAN'T LET TERRY KNOW WHO I AM... NOT YET.

...YOUSEF VOLOKHOV, A VISITING SCIENTIST FROM THE *EAST-WEST ATOMIC WARFARE, SCIENCE AND APPLICATIONS CONFERENCE*, IS STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR. SOURCES CLOSE TO THE NYPD HAVE INFORMED US OF A MAJOR SEARCH FOR THE MISSING TECHNICIAN. FOUL PLAY HAS NOT BEEN RULED OUT.

CNN

Y'KNOW, BROTHER, YOU MIGHT WANT TO BE MORE CAREFUL WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND HERE.

I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT. THANKS, MISTER, FOR PULLIN' MY SKILLET OUT OF THE FIRE.

I'LL NEVER LET WANDA BECOME A WIDOW AGAIN.

IF YOU ASK ME, IT'S ALL ABOUT *MONEY*. THE RUSSIANS HAVE ALL THE ROMANCE AND LIMELIGHT OF BIG CHANGES. WHAT GETS LOST IN THE SHUFFLE IS THAT THE *OTHER* EX-SOVIET REPUBLICS ARE ALSO STRUGGLING FOR A NEW SYSTEM. *THEY* NEED MONEY, *TOO!* THE UKRAINE, WHERE VOLOKHOV IS FROM, COULD USE EVEN A *FIFTH* OF THE AID THAT HAS BEEN PROMISED TO RUSSIA.

PERCIVAL ISSACSEN-SMYTHE, PLEASE...

FITZGERALD, TERENCE D., A5A-923777...

YO, PERCY. I JUST GOT THE BEJEESUS KICKED OUT OF ME. NAH, SOME *MATCH-CRISP* DUDE HELPED ME OUT.

...NO, NO, WHAT I *NEED* IS FOR YOU TO ROLL ME DOWN SOME MUSCLE, *STAT*. THAT'S *RIGHT*, YOU BIT OFF MORE THAN I CAN CHEW!

<I HAVE A PROBLEM, MY FRIEND. I AM DUE TO GIVE MY LECTURE IN TWO HOURS. HOWEVER, A KEY ELECTRICAL ELEMENT WAS DAMAGED ON MY JOURNEY. I AM AT A LOSS.>

<TOO DRAFTY IN HERE.>

<MY NEIGHBOR'S SON WORKS FOR AN ELECTRONICS FIRM. HE IS QUITE SKILLED. IN FACT, HE SHOULD BE HERE NOW, GETTING HIS LAUNDRY FROM HER. SHE LIVES IN NUMBER-->

<-- 212, DOWNSTAIRS. LET US GO TALK TO THE BOY.>

THUMP

ATOMIC WEAPONS? I KNEW THERE WAS MORE HERE THAN MEETS THE EYE! I DON'T KNOW WHO THE KID'S WORKING FOR, THOUGH.

THIS MUST BE BIG. TERRY'S CALLED IN SOME GOONS.

SO WHAT HAPPENED HERE?

ACTUALLY, I WOKE UP OUTSIDE.

HOW LONG AGO DID VOLOKHOV LEAVE?

I DO NOT KNOW. HE WENT TO THE UNIVERSITY.

WHAT ABOUT THESE BOZOS? YOU'RE IN CHARGE HERE.

I'M NOT HURT... FORGET THEM. WE HAVE TO GET TO COLUMBIA, A.S.A.P.

YOU MISSED A GOOD SHOW, BUT NOTHING LIKE THE ONE WE'RE GOING TO NOW.

HOP IN!

BUT WE HAVE TO GET TO COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY! SOMETHING DANGEROUS IS GOING ON!

YOU PEEKED AT THESE, DIDN'T YOU? I GOT THEM FROM THE KID'S WALLET-- FRONT ROW, CENTER!

I KNEW IT! THE KID WORKS FOR THE COMMIES!

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY... DAY THREE OF THE CONFERENCE.

WHAT EXACTLY IS VOLOKHOV GOING TO BE SPEAKING ABOUT?

DEMONSTRATION OF AN ATOMIC DETONATOR.

WE HAVE TO GET IN THERE. WE'RE WITH THE GOVERNMENT...

...F.B.I....

...N.R.C....

...uh, SECRET SERVICE...

NOT TO DIGRESS, GENTLEMEN, BUT IF YOU'RE NOT FACULTY, THAT'LL BE SIX BUCKS EACH.

WAIT A MINUTE... WHAT DOES HE MEAN, "DEMONSTRATION OF AN ATOMIC DETONATOR"?

GREENWICH VILLAGE...

RADIO H

PPLE

AF-356

<AEROFLOT HAS FLOWN ME TO HEAVEN!>

ICKARD BELL

IT'S A SCIENTIST'S SUPERMARKET! SONY! HITACHI! NEC!

YOU AMERICANS LEAD THE WORLD IN TECHNOLOGY!

LOOK, OLD MAN, I'VE BUILT MORE DETONATORS THAN YOU'VE GOT CHINS...

ARE YOU SURE YOU CAN *FIX* MY *DETONATOR* IN TIME?

Eh?

FRAGILE

FRAGILE
ANDLE WITH CARE

IBM
PS4 486DX 50

EMPLOYEES ONLY

JVC

I SAID, NO PROBLEM. I'M ALMOST THERE.

I THINK?

GOOD, FOR WE MUST HURRY. WE ARE NEARLY LATE FOR MY LECTURE.

YAMAHA! *sigh*

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, HALFWAY ACROSS TOWN AND LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER...

IT IS A SURPRISINGLY LARGE TURN-OUT FOR THE DRY TOPIC AT HAND. ONLY THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS OR DEVOUT WEAPONRY WONKS WOULD BE INTERESTED IN FINELY ENGINEERED ATOMIC DETONATORS.

THEY WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED.

THE AUDIENCE GROWS QUIET AS YOUSEF VOLOKHOV, A PIONEER OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION'S ATOMIC PROGRAM, WALKS TO THE PODIUM.

THIS IS HIS PROUDEST MOMENT. HE HAS SPENT OVER FORTY YEARS IN TOP-SECRET RESEARCH. NOW, AT LAST, HE CAN GAIN THE EYES AND EARS OF THE WORLD.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER REASON FOR YOUSEF TO BE HERE. HIS OBJECTIVE IS **NOT** RECOGNITION. THE **WELL-BEING** OF HIS COUNTRY, THE **UKRAINE**, IS HIS **SOLE** CONCERN.

THE MOMENT IS AT HAND. MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE SMILE IN RECOGNITION. THERE'S NO MISTAKING THE CHROMIUM STEEL OBJECT FOR ANYTHING BUT WHAT IT IS:

...AN ATOMIC BOMB.

THE BRIEFCASE IS HANDED GINGERLY TO YOUSEF.

KLIK

HE WITHDRAWS A SHIELDED CONTAINER.

IN IT IS ENOUGH **PLUTONIUM** FOR A BOMB WHICH COULD LEVEL A GOOD-SIZED SECTION OF A CITY...

...THIS CITY.

THE AUDIENCE REACTS, EITHER IN TERROR OR GIGGLING **ANTICIPATION**. THEN, ABRUPTLY, THE **GUNS** MAKE IT ALL REAL.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES. YOU CANNOT DOUBT WHAT YOUR EYES ARE SHOWING YOU. IT ***IS INDEED*** AN AN ATOMIC BOMB. IT IS NOW ***PRIMED***.

RATHER THAN MY LECTURE, I WILL NOW PRESENT MY ***DEMANDS***.

MY UKRAINE HAS LANGUISHED IN ***POVERTY*** WHILE HER COUSIN RUSSIA HAS GAINED ALL THE ATTENTION OF THE WORLD. IT IS TIME FOR THIS TO ***END***.

KA-CHIK!

YOU AND YOUR GOVERNMENTS SHALL LOAN MY UKRAINE 1.5 BILLION DOLLARS-- ONE BILLION PER KILOTON OF MY DEVICE HERE-- OR I SHALL ***DESTROY*** NEW YORK CITY.

GUNS! ***EVERY-BODY GET DOWN!!***

ATOMIC TERRORISTS! PERCY WAS RIGHT! ***HO-LEE--!***

CAN'T GET A CLEAR LINE OF FIRE!

GUNS! COMMIES WITH GUNS!!

...AND ***SORCERER*** WITH ***BIGGER*** GUN.

THE OVERLAPPERS HAVE COME BEFORE THE **PRIME**, BY FAR THE OLDEST OF THE CREATURES DWELLING HERE, AND LINKED DIRECTLY INTO THE LIVING REALM ITSELF.

ALL DATA, GATHERED FROM A BILLION UNIVERSES, IS FED DIRECTLY THROUGH THIS CREATURE SO THAT THE OVERLAP MAY BE **NOURISHED**, AND **THRIVE**. SO IT HAS BEEN **FOREVER**.

COME FORTH AND SPEAK TO ME, MY EYES AND EARS.

MOST GRACIOUS SUPERIOR, OUR NEW EXPERIMENTS GO WELL.

THE BOMB...

WE WILL SOON LEARN IF IT IS POSSIBLE TO DESTROY A HELL-CREATURE WITH **ATOMIC BOMBARDMENT**. OUR EXPERIMENT WILL PROVIDE US WITH MUCH-NEEDED DATA ON THE PHYSICAL EXTREMES THE CREATURES OF EARTHIAN HELL CAN WITHSTAND.

TELL HIM ABOUT THE BOMB...

YES, YES. WE HAVE INSINUATED AN EARTHIAN PARTICLE-SPLITTING DEVICE. AND WITH THAT, WE HAVE ALSO CONDEMNED THAT MEDDLER **HOUDINI** TO HIS END.

VERY GOOD. PROCEED. I AM CERTAIN YOU WILL HAVE FRESH KNOWLEDGE TO FEED US. HOWEVER, THIS HOUDINI IS YOUR OWN AFFAIR.

YES, MY SUPERIOR. YOU SHALL BE **WELL-FED**...

...AND THE OVERLAP SHALL CELEBRATE THE **TRIUMPH** OF OUR NEW INFORMATION!

WHILE, ON EARTH, THE TEST CONTINUES...

PLEASE. EVERYONE TO REMAIN CALM. YOUR GUNS WILL NOT STOP US.

!!!

ALWAYS THE PERFORMER, HOUDINI STARTS THE SHOW WITH A SHOT INTO THE AIR.

KOOM

FRAYED NERVES SNAP. INSTINCT DIRECTS SHOTS AT THE ONLY FAMILIAR TARGET: SPECIAL AGENT **FITZGERALD.**

BLAM

JEE-ZUS!

NOOO!

THE EXITS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN. CHAOS ENSUES.

BAM

FOOLS. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SO *SIMPLE*.

KLIK

YOU IDIOTS! *ENOUGH!!* I HAVE STARTED THE *TIMER*!

LEGGO, IGOR!

ARMED

BiDEEP BiDEEP BiDEEP

TO NATION

IF YOU DO NOT *END* THIS MADNESS, THE BOMB WILL END IT *FOR* YOU.

THANK YOU. I RETURN YOUR LIVES TO YOU FOR NOW.

SKOUP!

JVG

ARMED

BiDEEP BiDEEP BiDEEP

TO NAT

BOJA MOI! IT WILL NOT STOP!

15

AIIIIIII!

I'VE DONE MY BIT. THAT'S MY CUE TO CHECK OUT OF HERE.

S-KOIP!

THOSE SCHMUCKS HAVE SHUT ME *OUT!* IT'S TIME I PAID THEM A PIECE OF MY MIND.

CONCENTRATE...

...JUST ANOTHER TRAP...

...GOT MY PATHWAY...

...*VISUALIZE*...

RMED

THIS IS OUR MOMENT! TO THINK WE FEARED HOUDINI'S REVOLUTIONARY TALK. I SALUTE YOU, %^9.

I *AM* GOOD...

FOCUS!!!

HURTS!

TRANSMIT THE BLAST...

...CHANNEL...

...THE BLAST...

REALITY SHATTERS LIKE CANDIED GLASS. THE PART OF OUR UNIVERSE CONTAINING THE BOMB IS TRAPPED BY THE SORCERER, AND SHUNTED INTO ANOTHER PLACE.

THE INSTANT OF THE ATOM'S SPLIT-- THE TIME WHEN FIERCE ENERGIES ARE RELEASED-- NEVER EVEN HAPPENS ON OUR WORLD.

SPAWN CARRIES ON, UNAWARE OF THE PACKAGED MOMENT BEYOND HIM, VENTING HIS RAGE ON TERRY'S ATTACKER.

AS NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM, SO TOO DOES REALITY, ONLY MORE SO. THE STAGE AND OTHER PARTS OF OUR WORLD ARE RENT VIOLENTLY FROM THIS PLANE, FOLLOWING IN THE WAKE OF THE TRANS-PORTED BLAST.

MAGICIANS' CLUB STORAGE

COMPRESSED INTO A BEAM OF POWER, THE REALITY ENVELOPE IS SHOVED THROUGH THE MAIL SLOT OF AN UNSUSPECTING ADDRESSEE. BY REFLEX, HOUDINI USES THE MEMORY OF HIS TRUNK AS A FOCUS-- AND SENDS THE TIGHT PARTICULATE STREAM WHERE IT WILL DO THE MOST GOOD.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S LECTURE HALL IS BUZZING WITH AMAZED SCIENTISTS. THERE WAS LESS THAN A **SECOND** OF LIGHT -- BUT THAT WAS ENOUGH TO INSPIRE IDLE SPECULATION FOR YEARS TO COME.

FRIED. DAMN. I HAD SO MUCH TO LEARN FROM YOU HOUDINI -- IF YOU REALLY WERE HOUDINI.

A FLASH...

AND THEN...

IT VANISHED...

OR SOME-THING...

DID YOU HEAR SOME-THING?

Eh -- IT WAS JUST THE ICE MACHINE DOWN THE HALL.

H. GEIGER 1882-1945

MOMENTS AGO, THESE GEIGER COUNTERS WERE SET OFF THE SCALE BY RADIATION FROM VOLOKHOV'S **BOMB**.

SO THOROUGH WAS HOUDINI'S MAGIC THAT, FOR A MOMENT, EVEN NORMAL BACK-GROUND LEVELS WERE FLAT.

CNN

...APPEARS TO BE AN ATTEMPTED NUCLEAR TERRORIST ACTION AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. WHAT YOU ARE SEEING IS AMATEUR VIDEO, SHOWING WHAT WE BELIEVE TO BE TWO OF THE TERRORISTS. POLICE WILL SAY ONLY THAT ONE IS AN AMERICAN, THE OTHER A UKRANIAN NATIONAL, AND THAT THERE WAS SOME SORT OF BOMB THREAT.

WITNESSES CLAIM THAT THOUGH IT SEEMED THERE WAS AN EXPLOSION, THE EVIDENCE IS IN DISPUTE. HOWEVER, THE PRESENCE OF AN ARMED ATOMIC BOMB HAS BEEN CORROBORATED BY ANY NUMBER OF EXPERT WITNESSES.

FIRE CREWS ARE LOOKING FOR ANY POSSIBLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THESE REPORTS AND A BLACKENED PART OF THE HALL WHERE THE STAGE HAD BEEN.

THE ALLEGED THREAT WAS APPARENTLY AVERTED BY A SUSPECTED *YOUNGBLOOD*, THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN *"FRIED TO A CRISP"* BY SOME UNKNOWN FORCE AT THE SCENE.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS DENIED BOTH THE REPORT OF THE NUCLEAR THREAT AND SUPPOSED EXPLOSION, AND OF ANY YOUNGBLOOD ACTIVITY IN NEW YORK CITY AT THAT TIME. COULD THIS HAVE BEEN A ROGUE 'BLOOD, CONNECTED TO SOME PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN ORGANIZATION?

CERTAINLY SOMEONE OR SOME*THING* WAS RECORDED LEAVING THE SCENE. HERE WITH AN ANALYSIS...

ELSEWHERE ON THE COLUMBIA CAMPUS...

SEEMS HOUDINI LEFT THE CAR INVISIBLE. THAT MAKES IT UP TO ME TO FIND IT.

JUST CONCENTRATE... USE THE COSTUME TO REARRANGE THE PHOTONS... MAKE THE CAR REAPPEAR...

PERFECT. I GUESS I MIGHT BETTER AT MAGIC THAN I THOUGHT.

SORRY ABOUT THE MYSTERY HERE, TERRY, BUT I CAN'T HAVE YOU KNOW ABOUT ME JUST YET.

DAMMIT! HOUDINI HAD THE KEYS!

FINE. I'LL JUST MANIFEST THEM.

EASY!

tssing

BY CREATING THE KEY, SPAWN PASSED HOUDINI'S TEST.

WHAT THE--

Poof

THE CAR'S PURPOSE THUS FULFILLED, IT DEFAULTS BACK TO THE OVERLAP.

BACK IN THE BOWERY, LIFE HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL IN THE HOURS AFTER THE LECTURE..

THE POLICE, LEFT WITH NO EVIDENCE OF A CRIME, HAVE DROPPED ALL CHARGES AGAINST PORSCHE MacNEIL.

I SHOULDA GOT SOME *FOOD* FROM MOM, TOO. I'M *STARVED*.

HEY.., SOMEONE'S BEEN *IN* HERE. I..

THOUGH LOUD, THE BLAST WAS HARMLESS. CONFETTI FALLS, A PAPER RAIN CARRYING A NOTE WITH IT.

DON'T EVER MESS WITH ME OR MY ALLEY AGAIN, OR THE NEXT ONE TAKES OUT YOU AND THE WHOLE BUILDING WITH IT.

— SPAWN

THE OVERLAP. TIMELESS AND INFINITE. NOW, ALSO, AT THIS STUDY GROUP'S FORUM, A SCENE OF ATOMIC DECIMATION.

THE EXPERIMENT HAS BLOWN UP IN THEIR FACES.

IN THE DISTANCE, UNEXPECTED GUESTS ATTEMPT TO REGAIN THEIR EQUILIBRIUM.

FOR THE OTHER OVERLAPPERS, A NEW FIELD OF INQUIRY BECKONS: WHICH LIFEFORMS WILL BENEFIT FROM THE RADIATION... AND WHICH WILL DIE, OR SUFFER, OR MUTATE.

FOR SOME, THE SUFFERING IS OBVIOUS.

GREGOR... HAVE WE DIED?

WHERE ARE WE? HOW LONG MUST WE STAY HERE?

IS *THIS* THE AFTERLIFE?

NOT AT ALL, EARTHIAN SCUM! NOW THAT YOUR ENERGY HAS BEEN DAMPENED, YOU HAVE MUCH TO ANSWER FOR, AND EVEN MORE TO CLEAN!

IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW YOUR KIND FARE AGAINST RADIATION BURNS, LITTLE HUMANS. WE HAVE FOREVER TO LEARN!

Raaaht-- CLEAN! CLEAN!

FOREVER! --Raaahtt-- FOREVER!

AGAIN, 1916, ON A STAGE IN LOS ANGELES...

HE HASN'T GOT OUT YET! HARRY SAID RAISE IT AFTER FIVE MINUTES!

THE HUSHED AUDIENCE IS **TERRIFIED.** NO NORMAL HUMAN BEING COULD HAVE SURVIVED THIS LONG-- **FIVE MINUTES!**-- WITHOUT AIR.

THE TRUNK IS LOWERED TO THE STAGE.

INTENSITY BUILDS. THE GENTEEL CROWD WAITS BREATHLESSLY. WILL THEY SEE DEATH FIRSTHAND?

ONCE MORE, HARRY HOUDINI HAS MYSTIFIED THEM.

THANK YOU! YOU'RE TOO KIND!

A COUPLE MORE MANACLES AND I WOULDN'T'VE HAD THE SECONDS TO SLIP *AWAY* AND BACK!

Hm... PERHAPS I CAN WORK THAT "DIVERTED EXPLOSION" GIMMICK INTO MY SHOW.

OF COURSE, %^2 MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY AGAINST THAT.

LUCKY FOR HIM, I'LL HAVE TO SAVE THAT ENCORE FOR *ANOTHER* DAY.

Ahhh... MY PUBLIC. I RETURN FOR YOU YET AGAIN!

WHERE'S HIS CAPE?

The End

HEY!

WATCH IT, YOU BUTCHER!

SETTLE DOWN, YOU BIG BABY.

CRIPES.

YOU'D THINK I WAS MURDERIN' YA OR SOMETHING.

NOW STOP MOVING.

OW!

IN A CITY OF A MILLION VOICES, WE FOCUS OUR ATTENTION UPON TWO IN PARTICULAR.

ONE IS THE CURRENT RULER OF NEW YORK'S HIDDEN BACK STREETS -- A FIGURE WHOSE LIFE HAS GROWN AS TWISTED AS THE MATTED HAIR OF THE STRAY DOGS WHICH WANDER THOSE SAME ALLEYWAYS.

THE OTHER BELONGS TO ONE OF THE MANY HOME-LESS UNDER THIS NEW SENTINEL'S WATCHFUL EYE...

...ONE WHOSE GRATITUDE IS NEARLY BEYOND WORDS.

JEE-ZUZ! WHAT A WIMP!

LISTEN, AL. I'M DOING THE BEST I CAN.

SO A LITTLE RESPECT AND THANKFULNESS MIGHT NOT KILL YA-- YOU THINK?

LOOK, I'M NOT COMPLAINING OR ANY-THING...

...BUT WHEN YOU SAID YOU'D HAD SOME MEDICAL EXPERIENCE, I ASSUMED YOU MEANT MORE THAN JUST THE BARBARIC, STONE-AGE KIND.

EVERY-ONE'S A FRIGGIN' CRITIC.

CONSIDER YOURSELF LUCKY I DIDN'T DECIDE TO TIE ONE ON BEFORE I STARTED.

HA HA

THEN I'D REALLY BE SHAKY.

GET IT?!

TIE ONE ON?

TIE?

HA HA HAAA

I CAN HARDLY CONTAIN MYSELF.

THERE! THAT JUST ABOUT DOES IT. BY THE WAY, I FORGOT TO ASK-- HOW'D YOU GET THAT NASTY GASH ANYWAY?

RAN INTO SOME BOZO IN BLACK.*

*SEE ISSUES 19 AND 20. NOT OUT YET! - Tom.

SO? HOW DO I LOOK?

BOBBY! DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?

COME HERE. LEMME SEE.

I LOVE IT!!

THAT WAS QUITE A *BEAUTY* YOU HAD THERE. BUT I'M *TELLIN'* YA, NO ONE'S GOING TO NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE. *TRUST* ME!

SO THERE YOU *HAVE* IT!

BIG, BAD BOBBY SAVES THE DAY ONCE AGAIN!

YOU KNOW, IF I WASN'T SUCH A *LOSER*, I'D THINK I WAS A *WINNER!*

BUT TO BE COMPLETELY HONEST, I REALLY DON'T SEE WHY WE GOTTA WORRY ABOUT YOUR VANITY-- I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT HAMBURGER HEAD OF YOURS WAS A WORK OF ART TO *BEGIN* WITH.

THANKS FOR THE PICK-ME-UP.

AWW!

C'MON, AL.

QUIT BEING SUCH A BIG *POOP!* THINGS ARE WORKING OUT *GREAT!*

THIS SIDE UP

AND THE BEST PART?

I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO USE MY OWN SHOELACE!

STOLE THIS PUPPY FROM ONE OF THEM *DORKS* OVER ON 52nd.

WHAT COULD BE BETTER?

MY LIFE.

Oh. THAT.

NOTHING GOOD IS HAPPENING. EVERY TIME I MAKE A MOVE, THERE'RE SOME CREEPS OUT THERE TRYING TO MAKE A NAME FOR THEMSELVES.

I USED TO KNOW WHAT GOOD AND BAD MEANT. NOW EVERYTHING'S SCREWED UP. HEAVEN. HELL. DEMONS. MAGIC. YOU NAME IT. THEY'RE ALL AFTER ME ON SOME LEVEL.

HOW'S THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

DRAINED.

I'M MENTALLY TIRED OF IT ALL. THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANTED. NONE OF THIS.

I JUST WANTED MY WIFE. JUST MY WIFE. NOTHING ELSE. DOES THAT MAKE ANY SENSE, BOBBY?

PERFECT.

LOOK, AL, I KNOW I'M NOT THE BEST LOOKER IN TOWN AND DON'T HAVE MUCH OF A LIFE, BUT I USED TO BE MARRIED, TOO. SAINT OF A WOMAN. PUT UP WITH ME FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS. ALWAYS THERE FOR ME.

MET HER AT A CHURCH FUNCTION IN '57. PRETTIEST GAL BY FAR. Y'KNOW, PEOPLE TAKE THOSE KINDS OF THINGS FOR GRANTED. I KNOW I DID. TWENTY-THREE YEARS OF HAPPINESS... THEN BOOM. IT'S OVER.

CANCER OF THE BRAIN. I DON'T RECOMMEND IT.

IT ATE AWAY AT THAT WOMAN LIKE ACID. BY THE TIME THE END CAME SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHO I WAS.

COULDN'T EAT. CRAP. MOVE. NOTHING. IN SPITE OF IT ALL, THOUGH, SHE DIDN'T PUT UP A FUSS. DIDN'T WANT TO BOTHER ANY-ONE.

ESPECIALLY NOT ME.

THEN THE DOCTORS--WITH ALL THEIR SO-CALLED POWERS--TOLD ME THEY COULDN'T HELP.

THIS WOMAN WHO WAS A SAINT, THEY COULDN'T EASE HER SUFFERING.

THEN THESE BUGGERS MADE ME SIGN PAPERS TO PULL THE PLUG.

BLAM. END OF GAME.

YOU CAN SEE HOW WELL I'VE HANDLED IT SINCE. WASN'T MAN ENOUGH TO PICK UP THE PIECES AND CARRY ON. SO I WALLOWED IN SELF-PITY 'TIL I LOST EVERYTHING.

I'M SORRY, BOBBY.

I DON'T WANT YOUR PITY. THAT'S NOT THE POINT. I JUST DON'T WANT YOU TURNING OUT TO BE LIKE ME OR THE OTHER GUYS.

WE LOOK UP TO YOU.

GAWD!

LISTEN TO ME BLUBBERING LIKE A TWO-YEAR-OLD.

WHAT I'M ***TRYING*** TO SAY IS THAT YOU'RE OKAY!

YOU NEED TO FIND YOUR ANSWERS. ***DO IT.*** JUST DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF WHAT YOU ALREADY ***HAVE.***

WHICH IS?

US.

SINCE YOU SHOWED UP, THINGS HAVE BEEN STRANGE AROUND HERE. WELL, MAYBE IT'S YOU, MAYBE NOT. WHO CARES. WHAT I ***DO*** KNOW IS THAT THE BOYS AND I ***LIKE*** HAVING YOU AROUND.

MAKES US FEEL A BIT ***COCKY,*** IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

IF YOU CAN'T PICK UP THE PIECES, THEN YOU AIN'T ANY BETTER THAN *US.*

WE ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE MORE THAN THAT.

HELL!

FOR OUR SAFETY, WE *NEED* YOU TO BE MORE THAN THAT.

THANKS, BOB.

THANKS A WHOLE LOT.

IT'S TIME I STARTED TAKING CONTROL OF **THIS** LIFE.

YOU TELL THE GUYS NOT TO WORRY. EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE.

SPAWN THEN DISAPPEARS INTO THE BLACK OCEAN OF SHADOWS, LEAVING BEHIND ONE OF HIS MANY ADMIRERS.

IS HE *COOL?* OR *WHAT?*

WHAT?!

UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S TRUE, MR. WYNN.

THESE NEW REPORTS CAME IN DURING YOUR RECENT DISAPPEARANCE. WE JUST NOW RECEIVED THE FINISHED BRIEF. AFTER EXTENSIVE CROSS-CHECKING, WE'VE HAD TO CONCLUDE THAT AGENT FITZGERALD SHOULD BE NO LONGER CONSIDERED A MAJOR SUSPECT BEHIND THE RECENT SECURITY BREACHES.

WE'RE SORRY, SIR.

A COVERT DIRECTOR OF THE C.I.A., **JASON WYNN** RUNS HIS OFFICE WITH NEAR IMPUNITY...

...HIS AMBITIONS STEAM-ROLLING OVER ANY INNOCENTS IN HIS WAY.

PRESENTLY, THE LOCAL POLICE ARE MONITORING HIM, AND THERE ARE TEN F.B.I. AGENTS ON THE CASE AS WELL. SHOULDN'T WE CALL IT OFF, POSSIBLY TARGET ANOTHER OF OUR SUSPECTS?

SIR?

TRAPPED. IT'S NOT A POSITION JASON WYNN HAS FOUND HIMSELF IN VERY OFTEN. HIS TWO-DAY DISAPPEARANCE* HAS FURTHER COMPLICATED THE SITUATION. THE PRESIDENT WASN'T SATISFIED WITH WYNN'S EXPLANATION. TO PULL MEN FROM AN OPERATION WOULD BE A CLEAR ADMISSION OF ERROR...

...AND WEAKNESS.

CONTINUE SURVEILLANCE AS USUAL.

FITZGERALD REMAINS OUR PRIME TARGET.

*ISSUES 16 TO 18 -- Tom

ASSIGN SOME MEN TO COVER HIS WIFE. ***MS. BLAKE*** IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED EITHER.

THEN WAIT FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

BUT, SIR-- THE REPORT! ARE YOU SURE THAT...

HAVE IT DESTROYED.

NOW.

THUS, WYNN PROTECTS HIMSELF FROM ANY PERCEIVED WRONGDOING AND REINFORCES HIS AUTHORITY.

BY THE WAY, AGENT ROENICK...

IF YOU *EVER* QUESTION MY ORDERS AGAIN, I'LL HAVE YOU KILLED.

EXCUSE ME, GENTLEMEN! MR. FITZGERALD IS EXTREMELY BUSY. HE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO--

MOVE IT, LADY! WE NEED A WORD WITH YOUR BOSS.

WHAT THE HECK?!

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT, GENTLE-MEN.

Oh YES YOU *CAN!*

SLAM!

MR. FITZGERALD, I COULDN'T *STOP* THEM, SIR...

THAT'S OKAY, JULIA. I'LL SEE THEM. YOU CAN HAVE THE REST OF THE DAY OFF.

NOW... WHAT MAY I DO FOR *YOU* TWO?

YOU THINK YOU'RE PRETTY *SLICK*-- *DON'T* YA, FITZY!

WELL, THE WORD'S OUT ON *YOU*, BUD. TURNING ON YOUR OWN KIND. *tsk.*

*YET **ANOTHER** VISIT FROM THOSE HE HAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED FRIENDS. THIS TIME, **TERRY FITZGERALD** FACES REPRESENTATIVES OF THE F.B.I.*

GUYS LIKE *YOU* MAKE OUR JOB TWICE AS HARD. WE GOT ENOUGH PROBLEMS WITH THE *CIVILIANS.*

YEAH. AND WE *DON'T* LIKE PROBLEMS WITH ONE OF OUR *OWN.*

EXACTLY.

TECHNICALLY, YOU'RE CLEAN... BUT I PROMISE YOU, *THAT* WON'T *LAST.*

YOU SEE, YOU'VE ATTRACTED THE *PERSONAL* INTEREST OF ME AND THE BOYS. *SOME*THING'S GOING TO TURN UP. AND IF IT *DOESN'T...*

...I BET WE FIND SOMETHING ODD ANYWAY.

YOU'RE GOING DOWN, FITZGERALD.

TERRY CAN ONLY STAND IN SILENCE AS THE THREATS AND INNUENDO SLICE EVER DEEPER. HIS MIND RACES. HE AFFECTS CALM.

HE HAS BEEN HARASSED BY EVERY MAJOR SECURITY FORCE IN OUR NATION.

GUYS, PLEASE LISTEN...

SHUT **UP**, WEASEL. AIN'T **NOTHING** GOING TO SAVE YOUR NECK, TURNCOAT.

NOW GET YOUR PHONE.

RINGG! RINGG! RINGG!

JASON WYNN'S DISPLEASURE IS FELT IN AGENCY AFTER AGENCY. WHEELS HE SETS IN MOTION SPIN IN ALL DIRECTIONS. HIS MOTIVES ARE NOT QUESTIONED.

HELLO?

HI, SWEETY. JUST CHECKING TO MAKE SURE YOU DIDN'T FORGET OUR DINNER DATE TONIGHT.

Um... uh-- NO, WANDA, I DIDN'T.

GREAT. I HAVE MARYANNE COMING OVER TO BABYSIT **CYAN.** YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN HER AT THE PARK TODAY. **STILL** WON'T GO DOWN THE SLIDE BY HERSELF. MADE ALL THE KIDS WAIT IN LINE! SHE FINALLY MADE ME GO UP AND **GET** HER.

WHAT A KID!

ANYWAYS, ARE YOU GOING TO BE LEAVING THE OFFICE SOON?

Um-- SURE.

I JUST **FINISHED** A MEETING.

IMPORTANT ?

NOTHING SPECIAL.

BETTER WATCH YOUR **BACK,** FITZY, 'CAUSE THERE AIN'T NO ONE WATCHIN' OUT FOR IT NOW.

WE'LL **BE** IN TOUCH.

MAYBE THIS'LL JOG YOUR MEMORY!!

SMACK

EASY NOW, SIR.

NOW, LET'S TRY THIS AGAIN.

UMPHFF

POLICE BRUTALITY...

I GOT-- MY-- koff RIGHTS.

I'LL SUE...

YEAH, *YEAH*. I'LL WRITE UP A *REPORT*...

...MAKE SURE I GET EVERYTHING DOWN FOR YOUR *LAWYER*.

LIKE THAT POUND AND A HALF OF *CRACK* IN YOUR CAR. NOT TO MENTION THE ILLEGAL *FIREARMS*.

OF COURSE, I CAN SEE HOW AN UPSTANDING CITIZEN LIKE YOURSELF WILL BE TAKEN AT *HIS* WORD IN THIS INCIDENT.

WHAT D'YA THINK, TWITCH?

I'M LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB TOMORROW, SIR.

GOD, I LOVE HIS SARCASM.

FOR DETECTIVES **SAM BURKE** AND **"TWITCH" WILLIAMS**, N.Y.P.D., AN OCCASIONAL SCOURING OF THE 'SKIN' DISTRICT IS JUST ONE OF THE ROUTINES. NOT MUCH THAT'S USEFUL GIVES ITSELF UP WILLINGLY. THIS TIME AROUND, THOUGH, THEY HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN A CERTAIN **HERO FROM HELL**. HAVING GLIMPSED HIS CAPE NOW A SECOND TIME*, THEY KNOW THE TRAIL IS STILL HOT...

...THAT IT'S JUST A MATTER OF FINDING THE RIGHT RAT TO **LEAD** THEM.

*ISSUES 5 AND 14 --Tom

SUCK ME, FAT BOY! I AIN'T GIVING YOU NOTHING!

I *KNOW* MY RIGHTS.

WELL, HERE'S THE SET-UP. **YOU**, MY LITTLE SCUMBAG JIMMY, HAVE ***TWO DAYS*** TO GET ME THE INFO I WANT.

I ***SAID***--

DO I MAKE MYSELF ***CLEAR!***

Oh YES!

LIKE THE RIGHT TO DO BUSINESS WITH THOSE ***HIGH SCHOOL KIDS*** YOU KEEP SHOVING YOUR DRUGS TO.

I GUESS THAT'S A RIGHT.

WON'T BE GOOD FOR YOUR PROFES-SIONAL IMAGE IF YOU SUDDENLY HAVE TO PEDDLE YOUR STUFF FROM A ***WHEEL-CHAIR***.

DOESN'T LOOK ***COOL*** TO THE KIDS.

I SAID ***I DON'T*** KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT A GUY IN RED.

tsk tsk.

IF YOU ***DO***, I'LL ONLY CONFISCATE YOUR DRUGS AND MAKE SURE YOU DON'T SET UP SHOP AGAIN.

AND IF YOU ***DON'T*** ooo

...THEN I'LL MAKE SURE YOU GET PUT AWAY SO LONG YOU'LL WISH YOU'D BOUGHT STOCK IN THE ***VASELINE*** COMPANY.

DO I MAKE MYSELF ***CLEAR***, MISTER SWEET CHEEKS?

EEIII!

CRUNCH

FOR THE NEXT 48 HOURS, **JIMMY LINDEN** DISPLAYS REMARKABLE INITIATIVE AS HE DIGS FOR ANSWERS.

ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY, AL SIMMONS HUDDLES QUIETLY IN THE DISCARDED WASTE OF THE 'REAL' WORLD -- CAMOUFLAGED BY THE MAKESHIFT BEDDING OF THE HOMELESS.

DURING THESE LONELIEST HOURS, HE WONDERS HOW HE HAS BECOME SO DISTRACTED FROM THE SIMPLE GOAL OF THIS NEW UN-LIFE: TO SET THINGS STRAIGHT WITH HIS **WIDOW**, WANDA BLAKE.

HE'S NOT SURPRISED THEN AS ANOTHER COMPLICATION CROPS UP.

AL!

HEY AL!!

GET UP, MAN! WE GOT *TROUBLE* AGAIN!

WHAT IS IT, JODY?

SOME ***NAZI-SKINHEAD*** IS OUT LOOKING FOR YOU. SAYS HE WAS SENT BY THE ***MAFIA***. SAYS HE'S GOING TO KNOCK A FEW HEADS UNTIL YOU SHOW. SAYS YOU'RE A ***PUSSY!***

ANOTHER SNARL IN SIMMONS' TANGLED EXISTENCE. **ANOTHER** HOTSHOT LOOKING TO MAKE A NAME FOR HIMSELF AT THE **HELLSPAWN'S** EXPENSE.

WHAT HE'D BEEN SELFISHLY CONSIDERING AS "DISTRACTIONS" HAVE SURFACED AS ACTUAL **THREATS**. THESE FOLKS ARE **FAMILY** NOW, UNDER HIS PROTECTION, AND AL SIMMONS IS AT HEART A FAMILY MAN.

ON TOO MANY LEVELS, HIS FEELINGS ABOUT FAMILY AREN'T BEING MADE CLEAR.

IT'S TIME TO **EMPHASIZE** THAT POINT, LOUDLY AND WITH **FEELING.**

I DON'T GIVE A *CRAP* WHOSE SIDE YOU THINK YOU'RE ON...

I WANT ME YOUR MAGIC-MAN.

WHAT KIND OF SAVIOR LIVES ON THE *STREETS*? MUST BE SOME FRIGGIN' *PSYCHO!*

YOU CALLED...?

UHNH

OWW!

LONG FINGERS ENDING IN UNGODLY TALONS TEAR THROUGH CLOTH, FLESH AND MUSCLE...

...REACH BONE...

...AND LOCK TIGHT.

YAAAGH!!

I'D LIKE A MINUTE OF YOUR TIME.

CRIPES-- MY ARM--!

I'M GOING TO ASK ONLY ONCE.

WHO SENT YOU, AND WHERE DO I FIND THEM?

INCLU-DING YOU.

LISTEN, FREAK. YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU'RE MESSIN' WITH. WHEN THE MOB GETS MAD, PEOPLE GET HURT.

YOU TOOK THE WORDS RIGHT OUT OF MY MOUTH.

SKA-SH-LL

DON'T YOU SCREW WITH THESE GUYS.

THEY'LL HURT YOU. YOUR FAMILY. YOUR FRIENDS. EVEN YOUR FRIGGIN' PETS.

SO DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND GET OUTTA TOWN. IT'LL SAVE EVERYONE A LOT OF BLOOD.

SPAWN SAYS NOTHING -- JUST CROUCHES OVER HIM AND **STARES**.

TWENTY SECONDS PASS.

YOU CRAZY BUGGER!

THEY'LL KILL YA!

YOU HEAR?!

YOU'RE DEAD MEAT!!

YOU'RE DAMN RIGHT I AM!

CHRIST.

NOT EVEN CLOSE.

SO MAKE SURE YOU TAKE A GOOD HARD LOOK--

--THEN TELL YOUR BOSS HE COULDN'T POSSIBLY DO ANY WORSE.

SO YOU TELL MISTER...?

GRAVANO. VITO GRAVANO.

?

THAT FATASS?!

HOW MANY OF HIS WHIPPING BOYS DO I NEED TO SPANK?*

*ISSUES 6 AND 7--Tom.

YOU TELL MR. GRAVANO THAT IF HE THINKS HE CAN DO ANY WORSE TO ME, THEN I'LL BE WAITING.

AND TELL HIM NOT TO TAKE TOO LONG.

YOU--YOU'RE CRAZY, MAN!

I'M NOT VERY PATIENT.

OTHER-WISE, I'LL BE PAYING HIM A VISIT. REAL SOON.

IT HELPS.

5:23 A.M.

THE SUN'S FIRST LIGHT SKIMS MANHATTAN -- DARTING AMONG OFFICE TOWERS AND OCCASIONALLY TRICKLING TO ALREADY-BUSY STREETS.

IS THAT SO?

IN THE SUITE POSITIONED TO CATCH THE **FIRST** GLEAM OF THAT LIGHT SITS **VITO GRAVANO**, A.K.A. **VITO GRAVES**, A.K.A. **DRACULA** ... MAFIA DON AND MADMAN

YES, SIR, MR. GRAVANO.

LOOKS LIKE THIS TOWN'S GOT ANOTHER HERO TRYING TO MAKE A NAME FOR HIMSELF.

FINE.

BUT NOT AT MY EXPENSE.

THANKS FOR LAYING OUT THE TRAP, MR. STEWART. I HAVE NO FURTHER USE FOR YOU.

Pardon?

YOU'RE FIRED.

YOU KNOW THE WAY OUT.

SLAM!

TESTY LITTLE CREEP.

ANYWAYS...

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO A *GREAT* WEEK. SMITHERS, BRING ME UP TO DATE.

AS YOU KNOW, SIR, WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR LINKS BETWEEN THE MURDERS OF YOUR ASSOCIATES AND SOME OTHER DISRUPTIVE SITUATIONS... THE MATTER OF THAT LITTLE FAT *CLOWN*, THE DISMANTLING OF THAT HIRED GUN *OVERT-KILL*, AND THE INVASION OF YOUR OFFICE BY A *COSTUMED VIGILANTE*.

CALLING IN *THE ADMONISHER* TO DEAL WITH THE CLOWN WAS A BRILLIANT MOVE, SIR.*

I APPRECIATE THAT.

WE'RE HAVING TO DO A LITTLE DIGGING ON THE LATTER TWO INCIDENTS.

SORTING OUT THE *CLOWN'S* KILLING SPREE HAS BEEN EASIER. THERE'S NO QUESTION HE CARRIED OUT THE HITS ON THE OTHER DONS, AND THAT HE ACTED ALONE.

CONTINUE.

*VIOLATOR #1 -- Tom.

REGARDING THE *OVERT-KILL* SITUATION, WE HAVE SOME NEW LEADS.

WE HAD DRAWINGS MADE OF THE WEAPONS YOU DESCRIBED, AS USED BY THE COSTUMED INVADER.*

*ISSUE #6.

OUR PEOPLE AT THE F.B.I. AND C.I.A. BOTH CONFIRM THE THEFT OF THOSE WEAPONS. THE FIREPOWER WAS EASILY SUFFICIENT TO PIERCE OVERT-KILL'S ARMOR.

IT TOOK SOME ARM-TWISTING, BUT WE GOT A NAME FOR A SUSPECT... SOMEONE WHO SEEMS TO HAVE STICKY FINGERS FOR CONFIDENTIAL FILES, AS WELL.

HE'S *TERENCE FITZGERALD*, AN OPERATIVE FOR SOME ULTRA-COVERT AGENCY.

GET ME EVERYTHING YOU CAN ON HIM.

ALREADY BEING DONE, MR. GRAVANO.

GOOD.

IF I FIND OUT HE'S IN *ANY* WAY CONNECTED TO OUR MYSTERIOUS HERO, HIS BALLS ARE *MINE!*

HELL!

EVEN IF HE'S *NOT* CONNECTED, WE'LL DUST HIM ANYWAYS!

YOU SEE, SMITHERS, I HAVE A CERTAIN REPUTATION, ONE WHICH I'M RATHER PROUD OF... UNDERSTAND?

YES, SIR.

I WILL NOT BE TRIFLED WITH.

SOME GOVERNMENT GEEK WANTS TO PLAY GOOD-GUY, FINE. AS LONG AS HE DOESN'T CROSS MY BOUNDRIES. *BUT!...*

...TO COME INTO *MY OFFICE* AND SHOOT IT ALL TO HELL...!

WELL, SMITHERS, THAT'S NOT A SIGN OF WAR. *THAT'S* A SIGN OF SUICIDE!

...HIS.

MY ASSOCIATES ARE ALREADY TALKING BEHIND MY BACK. I NEED TO SEND A SIGN THAT'LL SILENCE THEIR SNIGGERING.

FOR NOW, I'D LIKE A FULL REPORT ON THE ADMONISHER'S PROGRESS.

THEN, GET ME A STATUS FILE ON *OVERT-KILL'S* CURRENT CONDITION. THEY SAID THEY'D BE *DONE* WITH HIM BY NOW!!

AND...

...THEY'D BETTER HAVE *MORE* THAN JUST A *HEAD!!**

CRIPES, SMITHERS...

DEMONS! *HEROES!* *CLOWNS!* I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO THIS DAMN CITY, BUT IT'D BETTER KEEP CLEAR OF *ME!*

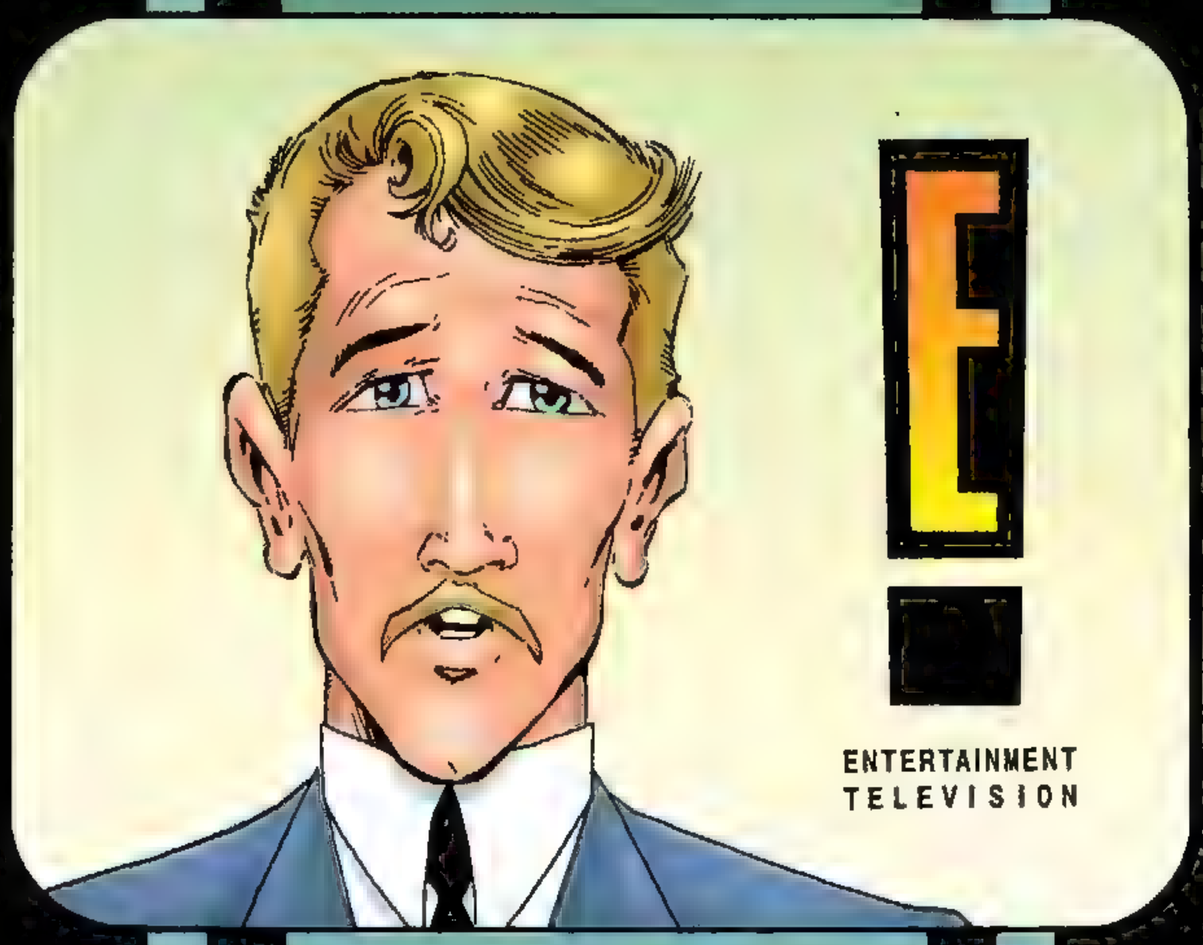
A FEW *DEATHS* SHOULD DO THE JOB.

*YOUNGBLOOD: STRIKEFILE #4.

...AN UNEXPECTED NAME IN THE NEWS TODAY IS ***JASON WYNN,*** A PREVIOUSLY LITTLE-KNOWN DEPARTMENT HEAD AT THE C.I.A. WYNN RECEIVED A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH FROM HIS DOCTORS, ACCORDING TO REPORTS RELEASED TODAY, AND HAS ALREADY BEEN BACK AT WORK SINCE MONDAY.

HE UNDERWENT SOME SIXTY PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS AFTER BEING DISCOVERED CRUMPLED ON HIS OFFICE FLOOR THE PREVIOUS FRIDAY. THERE ARE STILL FEW DETAILS REGARDING HIS ABSENCE WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY OF LAST WEEK, THOUGH ABDUCTION BY A HOSTILE AGENCY HAS NOT BEEN RULED OUT.

WYNN CLAIMS NO RECOLLECTION OF ANYTHING THAT OCCURED DURING HIS ABSENCE. ACCORDING TO A WITNESS, THE DIRECTOR WAS SPIRITED MYSTERIOUSLY OUT OF A C.I.A. GYMNASIUM. THE DISAPPEARANCE LED TO AN EXHAUSTIVE SEARCH WHICH ENDED WHEN A NIGHT CUSTODIAN FOUND HIM. APPARENTLY, WYNN HAD SOMEHOW RETURNED UNDETECTED TO HIS OWN PRIVATE OFFICE ON THE TENTH FLOOR, WHICH WAS LOCKED FROM THE OUTSIDE.



WHAT HAS DOCTORS CONCERNED IS WYNN'S UNEXPLAINABLE PARA-AMNESIA: REPEATED PROBES AND C.A.T. SCANS OF THE DIRECTOR'S BRAIN AND CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM HAS REVEALED NO INDICATIONS OF PHYSICAL TRAUMA OR INVASIVE MANIPULATION OF ANY SORT.

A HOSPITAL SPOKESPERSON, SPEAKING ON CONDITION OF ANONYMITY, EMPHASIZED THAT THERE IS NO SIGN OF INJURY WHATSOEVER AND THAT WYNN IS IN TOP PHYSICAL HEALTH. HOWEVER, HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE TESTED OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS IN CASE SIMILAR SYMPTOMS ARISE.

WYNN WAS UNAVAILABLE FOR COMMENT, BUT HIS PERSONAL AIDE HAS RELATED THAT MR.WYNN IS BACK TO WORK *"IN FULL FORCE"* AND PROCEEDING AS IF THE ENTIRE EVENT NEVER OCCURED. THE C.I.A., N.S.A. AND N.S.C: ALL HAD NO COMMENT BUT THAT MR. WYNN IS BEING WATCHED CLOSELY FOR ANY *SIGNS* OF FUTURE ABNORMALITY.

GREAT DAY IN THE MORNING! LET'S GO OVER THE FACTS, IF THE C.I.A. DOESN'T MIND. A MEMBER OF THEIR ***DIRECTORATE*** DISAPPEARS, ala *'STAR TREK,"* APPARENTLY OFF THE FACE OF THE ***EARTH,*** AND THEN JUST SHOWS UP TWO DAYS LATER, THUMB IN HIS MOUTH, HUDDLED IN A FETAL BALL IN HIS OFFICE. HE REMEMBERS ***SQUAT,*** BUT THAT'S OKAY, 'CAUSE HE'S ONE OF THE GOOD OL' BOYS. SO, THEY GET HIM TO PEE IN A CUP, A DOZEN TOP-SECURITY DOCTORS WRITE UP A DOZEN UNREADABLE REPORTS, AND THEY SEND HIM BACK TO WORK WITH AN APPLE IN HIS LUNCH-BOX. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY DECLARE IT ***MIGHT*** HAVE BEEN AN ENEMY ACTION AND YET DON'T BLINK AN EYE AT THE POSSIBILITY OUR TOP-SECRET BOY SCOUT IS ***COMPROMISED!***

WAS HE KIDNAPPED OR ***WASN'T*** HE? PERHAPS HE WAS OFF IN ARUBA WITH MISS MONEYPENNY--OUR TAX PENNIES AT WORK! I BET IF YOU OR I TRIED THIS CRAP WE'D BE WALKING THE STREETS IN TEN SECONDS FLAT. I KNOW *I'LL* SLEEP BETTER KNOWING THAT BOYS LIKE THIS ARE IN CHARGE OF OUR ***NATIONAL SECURITY!***

"BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER. THESE G-MEN ARE ALL JUST INTERESTED IN PUSHING THEIR OWN PERSONAL AGENDAS...

"...AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT *PUBLIC SERVICE*.

"THESE *HIGH AND MIGHTY* GOVERNMENT FACTIONS ALL HAVE THEIR LITTLE WARS TO FIGHT, AND SMALL GUYS LIKE YOU AND ME KEEP GETTIN' IN THE WAY!

"WELL, I JUST HOPE THERE'S SOMEBODY OUT THERE WITH ENOUGH *GUTS* TO STAND UP AND FIGHT BACK!"

NEXT EVERYBODY PLUS... OVERT-KILL!

PREDICTABLE.

THAT'S BECOME THE ESSENCE OF JOE SACIK'S LIFE. THE 15-HOUR WORK DAYS HAVE BECOME ROUTINE.

NO SOCIAL LIFE.

NO LOVE INTERESTS.

NO FRIENDS.

IN RETURN, HE HAS BEEN REWARDED WITH THE COMPLETE TRUST OF HIS BOSS--

-- VITO GRAVANO.

INDEED, JOE SACIK IS A LOYAL SERVANT OF THE MOB.

MAINTAINING THAT SHELL OF LEGITIMACY IS A MUST.

THE HIGHEST PRIORITY.

ALL THE PIECES ARE EVENTUALLY RELEVANT, AND THUS HE HAS ACCESS TO EVERY BIT OF DATA.

THAT TRUST IS AN EXHAUSTIVELY HEAVY BURDEN. AS HEAD OF ACCOUNTING, JOE HAS TO KEEP TABS ON ALL DETAILS OF TONY TWIST'S BUSINESS ACTIVITIES.

INFORMATION IS GATHERED. ORGANIZED. SANITIZED. CAREFULLY ACCOUNTED FOR. AN AUDIT WOULD SHOW A CLEAN, LEGAL OPERATION.

SKRITCH SKRITCH SKRITCH

SO JOE LABORS TOWARD THAT END, KEENLY FIDDLING ALL THE BOSS' DEALINGS INTO CLEAR HARMONY.

MAYBE TOO MUCH.

?

HELLO, JOE.

LET'S TALK.

YOUR BOSS.

I WANT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHERE HE IS.

YOU SEE, THE FAT MAN'S BEEN ASKING FOR ME.

THOUGHT I'D ANSWER HIS CALL.

GNAANHH...

H-H-HE...

I MEAN...

IF YOU DON'T CLEAR UP THAT STUTTERING... NOW...

...I'M GOING TO HAVE TO KILL YOU.

UNDERSTAND?

H- HE'S *GONE!*

I MEAN, HE'S NOT *HERE.* HE WANTED TO CHECK UP ON ONE OF HIS... uh... BUSINESS MATTERS.

YEAH, THAT'S IT!

NOW THAT WAS CONVINCING.

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO MESS WITH THIS. YOU JUST TELL ME **WHERE** VITO IS AND I LET YOU GO HOME.

OTHERWISE, WE'VE GOT US A **PROBLEM**, Y'KNOW WHAT I--

HUH?

HUH?!

SLAM!

FREEZE!

MAKE A MOVE AND YOU'RE ***DEAD!*** STEP AWAY FROM MR. SACIK, NOW, NICE AND SLOW.

AND I MEAN ***SLOW.***

HOW'D YOU GET IN HERE ANYWAY?

PIVOTING SLOWLY, SPAWN GLOWERS WHILE CONSIDERING HIS NEXT MOVE. UNEXPECTEDLY, THAT DECISION IS MADE FOR HIM.

*WITHOUT WARNING, HIS CHAINS LUNGE FORWARD LIKE **RATTLESNAKES!** THE SECURITY GUARDS DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT, BUT IT WASN'T **THAT!***

THEY REACT THE WAY THEY KNOW BEST: VIOLENTLY.

THIS NEW HELLSPAWN IS BECOMING LESS SURPRISED WHEN HIS COSTUME SPRINGS INTO ACTION. ITS LIFE IS JOINED TO HIS. HE KNOWS, SO IT HAS A STAKE IN HIS WELL-BEING.

THE HERO ALLOWS HIMSELF A SLIGHT SMILE.

BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
BRAKKA
CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
UH-
-OH!
BOOM
OH MY GOD.

NOW. WHERE WERE WE?

oh my God! oh my God! oh my God!

EXCEPT AT TAX TIME, JOE ISN'T REALLY GOOD AT DEALING WITH PRESSURE. HE KNOWS THERE'S NO TIME TO HIDE THE SENSITIVE FILES EVEN AS HE GRABS THEM, BUT CAN'T STOP HIMSELF.

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE, JOE?

NOTHING.

HERE YOU GO!

FITZGERALD,T

WHAT?

THIS FILE'S ON TERRY...!

I'LL BE **BORROWING** THESE FOR AWHILE, JOE.

THANKS.

THE PAIR STANDS IN SILENCE, JOE REPLAYING THE LAST SIXTY SECONDS IN HIS MIND. HE GATHERS, ORGANIZES AND QUICKLY FORMATS THE INFORMATION.

HE MELTS INTO A DARKENED CORNER. SECURITY PERSONNEL CAN FIND NO TRACE OF HIS VISIT.

AS FOR **JOE SAKIC**, THREE DAYS FROM NOW, HIS BODY WILL BE FOUND UNDER THE GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE, WITH HIS HANDS AND FEET VICIOUSLY SEVERED. DECAPITATED. EVEN HIS GENITALS WILL BE MISSING.

THE POLICE WILL CONDUCT A FULL INVESTIGATION, BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY-THING IDENTIFIABLE ABOUT THE BODY, WILL HAVE TO CLOSE THE CASE OF **JOHN DOE 1994-714.**

SUCH IS THE LIFE OF A TRUSTED EMPLOYEE OF VITO GRAVANO.

EXCUSE ME, SIR?

mmgglf...

JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH OUR SNITCH, JIMMY. SEEMS HE'S BEEN DOING HIS HOMEWORK.

ONE OF THE BUMS HE KNOWS SAYS OUR HERO USUALLY HANGS OUT IN THE SAME FOUR BLOCK RADIUS.

I'VE MAPPED IT OUT ALREADY, SIR.

mmm-mMMm...

I'LL DO SOME EARLY SCOUTING AND ASK A FEW QUESTIONS.

MEET YOU AT PORT AUTHORITY AT 10 O'CLOCK.

OKAY, SIR?

SIR!

IT SEEMS OUR LITTLE WEB HAS FINALLY CAUGHT US A *FLY*.

I *KNEW* THAT JIMMY WOULD COME THROUGH FOR US-- THOUGH I DIDN'T EXPECT IT *THIS* QUICKLY.

OBVIOUSLY, OUR PERSONAL CHAT HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON HIM.* IT'S AMAZING HOW *RESPECTED* US COPS ARE.

I FEEL LOVED!

BY THE WAY, DID YOU EAT THAT LAST *JELLY* DONUT?

MmmmM...

I WAS LOOKING *FORWARD* TO *THAT* ONE...

NOT ME, SIR.

BUT THOSE REDDISH GELATIN STAINS ON YOUR SHIRT MAY JOG YOUR MEMORY.

SO I'LL BE SEEING YOU AT TEN?

COUNT ON IT, TWITCH.

I GOT ME A LITTLE *PAYBACK* ON MY MIND.

chomp chomp

'EVENING, FRED.

BLARFF!

LET'S GO, TWITCH.

HEY *BOYS!*

HOW'RE THINGS WITH THE *REN AND STIMPY* OF NEW YORK'S FINEST?

GOING OUT TO CHASE MORE *GHOSTS*?

HARASS A FEW MORE OF THE *HOMELESS*?

C'MON, YOU C'N TELL *ME*.

HEY! MY *COFFEE!*

*SEE LAST ISSUE -- Tom

ANOTHER DAWN BREAKS OVER NEW YORK CITY. ONLY A FEW SPRINKLES OF SUNLIGHT PIERCE THE TIGHTLY-DRAWN BLINDS OF THESE **C.I.A.** OFFICE WINDOWS. IT'S AS IF THE STRUCTURE ITSELF RESISTS THE REVEALING LIGHT OF DAY.

THE **REPORTERS** WHO COVER SECURITY ISSUES WOULD **ENVY** THOSE STRAY SUNBEAMS. THEY'VE LATELY HAD THEIR VERY POINTED **QUESTIONS** MET WITH CLEVERLY IRRELEVANT ANSWERS. THE COMPLETE **TRUTH** HAS BEEN LOCKED TIGHTLY AWAY. ALL ATTEMPTS TO SHED LIGHT ON ONE PARTICULAR NEW EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE AGENCY ARE POLITELY DIVERTED AND FIRMLY **RESISTED.**

THOSE GLIMMERS OF THE RISING SUN CAST FAINT, FLUID, EERILY EVOLVING SHADOWS OVER THIS ORGANIZATION'S DIRECTOR. HE SITS ALONE AGAIN IN THE EXECUTIVE SUITE... PONDERING... CALCULATING.

HIS NAME IS **JASON WYNN.**

WHEN NOTICED AT ALL BY THE LARGER WORLD, HE IS REFERRED TO AS A MINOR DEPARTMENT HEAD IN CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE. IN CIRCLES THAT TRULY MATTER, THOUGH, WYNN'S AUTHORITY AND REPUTATION DWARF EVEN THAT OF THE LATE J. EDGAR HOOVER. HE DIRECTS THE ULTRA-SECRET **UNITED STATES SECURITY GROUP**, THE NATION'S HIGHEST-LEVEL TASK FORCE, WITH JURISDICTION IN ALL SITUATIONS, DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN. ONLY THE PRESIDENT, HIS CABINET AND THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF ARE PRIVY TO HIS FINDINGS -- STRICTLY ON A "NEED TO KNOW" BASIS.

HOWEVER, RECENT EVENTS HAVE CAST DOUBT ON HIS **CREDIBILITY.** WYNN IS UNABLE TO EXPLAIN HIS **TWO-DAY DISAPPEARANCE.*** SOMEONE HAS LEAKED THE ODD CIRCUMSTANCES TO THE MEDIA. ALREADY, ENEMIES THROUGHOUT THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY HAVE BEGUN CIRCLING, LOOKING FOR A WEAKNESS TO EXPLOIT. THE WHITE HOUSE IS UNHAPPY WITH HIS INABILITY TO ACCOUNT FOR THOSE TWO DAYS, AND IS ANNOYED TO BE READING ABOUT IT IN THE PAPERS. THE INTEREST OF THE PRESS IN THIS NEW-FOUND **SCANDAL** HAS, HIS ENEMIES SUGGEST, COMPROMISED THE MOTIVES BEHIND ANY OF HIS CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS.

ONE OTHER SERIES OF INCIDENTS, IN WYNN'S OWN BACK YARD, IS POTENTIALLY VERY UGLY. TO WIT: A **SECURITY BREACH** AT A NEGLECTED UPSTATE ARMORY. **MISSING ORDNANCE** FROM SAME. CLOSER TO HOME, **STOLEN PERSONNEL FILES.** ONE SUSPECT HAS BEEN TARGETED: TERENCE "TERRY" FITZGERALD, CLOSE FRIEND OF AN AGENT, AL SIMMONS, SECRETELY **TERMINATED** AT WYNN'S BEHEST.

A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION HAS PROVEN THAT FITZGERALD IS CLEAN. UNFORTUNATELY, JASON WYNN CANNOT AFFORD EVEN THE APPEARANCE OF PROFESSIONAL INADEQUACY. THEREFORE, THE FITZGERALD INQUIRY WILL CONTINUE. HIS GUILT IS PREDETERMINED. **WYNN WILL NOT FALL.**

REPUTATION. POWER.

THESE ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF **MADNESS.**

*HE WAS ABDUCTED BY AGENTS OF HEAVEN AND MADE A WARRIOR FOR THEIR CAUSE. SEE ISSUES 16 TO 18 -- Tom.

C.I.A.

F.B.I.

POLICE.

ALL HAVE BEEN TOLD THE SAME STORY:

...THAT ONE OF THEIR OWN HAS **TURNED** ON THEM: THE ACCUSATION COMES FROM SO HIGH UP THAT IT GOES **UNCHALLENGED**. MEANWHILE, "CONCRETE EVIDENCE" HAS BEEN MANUFACTURED, APPROPRIATE TO SATISFY ANYONE'S QUESTIONS.

MAN, WHAT A BORE!

I ***HATE*** FILLING OUT THESE DAMN REPORTS.

ESPECIALLY WHEN I HAVE TO FILL 'EM OUT IN ***RUSSIAN.***

WHAT A PAIN.

TERRY FITZGERALD CONCENTRATES ON HIS MONITOR, TRYING TO FORGET THE HARRASSING PHONE CALLS AND FACE-TO-FACE THREATS. PRACTICALLY EVERY LAW ENFORCEMENT OR INTELLIGENCE AGENCY IN THE STATE HAS MADE THEIR DISPLEASURE KNOWN.

HE IS GRATEFUL THAT WANDA IS UNAWARE OF THIS WITCH-HUNT. HIS FAMILY'S UNTOUCHED.

HE KNOWS THAT WON'T LAST.

COULD THE DEBACLE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY* HAVE HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH HIS PREDICAMENT? HE WAS NEVER CONFIDENT IN HIS FIELD ABILITIES-- WAS HE BEING **TESTED?** IF SO, IT WAS **NO** HELP WHEN THAT UKRANIAN NUCLEAR SCIENTIST--

EEEK!

JEE-ZUS!

*ISSUES 19 AND 20-- NOT OUT YET! -- Tom.

JULIA?

WHAT IS IT?!

TERRY!

WHAT KIND OF *SICK* PERSON WOULD DO SUCH A THING?!

TERRY!! THE *BOX!* IT'S--

-- IT'S--

I'LL PHONE SECURITY.

NO!

JULIA, DON'T.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS. YOU ALRIGHT?

Dear Filthy Rat!!

You're a DEAD Rat!!

-Your Friends

YES, THANKS.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?!

TROUBLE.

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE THREATS BEGAN, TERRY'S FEELING SCARED. HE THOUGHT HE WOULD HAVE FIGURED OUT AND RESOLVED THIS PROBLEM BY NOW. HE'S COME TO REALIZE HE WAS WRONG.

POSSIBLY *DEAD* WRONG.

*ISSUE 12 -- Tom.

DEEP WITHIN THE BOWELS OF MANHATTAN'S BACK STREETS, AL SIMMONS, THE HELL-SPAWN, SITS ON A THRONE OF WASTE AND DEBRIS. IT WAS ASSEMBLED BY THE HOME-LESS NOW UNDER HIS PROTECTION: HIS FIRST INSTINCT WAS TO SCOFF AT THEIR HANDIWORK, BUT WHAT ELSE COULD THEY HAVE BUILT TO SUPPORT HIS 400-POUND MASS? GRACIOUSLY, HE ACCEPTED THEIR GIFT, WHICH FORMALIZED HIS ROLE AS THE BOWERY'S DARK PROTECTOR...

...AND THEIRS, AS HIS PEOPLE.

THEY NEED HIM TO PLAY THE PART.

TO BE THEIR SAVIOR. THEIR NEW-FOUND GOD.

HE'S GRATEFUL-- IF A BIT UN-COMFORTABLE-- FOR THEIR DEVOTION. YET IT'S THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS FROM HIS PREVIOUS, HUMAN LIFE, WHO FILL HIS THOUGHTS. NOW BACK FROM THE DEAD, HE HAS AN UNHOLY MISSION. TO HIS DISMAY, HE FINDS THIS IS HAVING DIRE REPERCUSSIONS AMONG THOSE HE LEFT BEHIND.

GOD, NO.

VITO THINKS I'M TERRY.

...AND AS REQUESTED, MR. GRAVANO, AN ADDITIONAL CONTROL CIRCUIT HAS BEEN INSTALLED. IT WILL OVERRIDE ANY HOMING SIGNALS SENT OUT BY OUR OPPONENTS.

GOOD.

ADDITIONAL MODIFICATIONS WERE MADE TO HIS BARRIUM ARMOR. WHILE COMBAT DAMAGE TO HIS EXO-SKELETON IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE, THIS WILL KEEP IT MINIMAL.

THE SAME ASSAULTS USED IN THE PAST WOULD NOW BE RATHER USELESS.

EXCELLENT!

I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU AND YOUR BOYS.

uh...

THERE IS *ONE* SLIGHT PROBLEM, SIR.

THAT BEING?

IT SEEMS WE WEREN'T ABLE TO COMPLETELY WIPE SOME OF HIS MEMORIES. THERE ARE A FEW IMPULSE-WAVES THAT INCLUDE DATA ON THE GOVERNMENT'S ***YOUNG-BLOOD*** TEAM THAT IGNORED OUR *'DELETE'* COMMANDS.

DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?

TONIGHT.

BZZZT

I'M NOT CONCERNED ABOUT HIS MEMORY. I NEED HIM READY TO GO ***TONIGHT!*** WE'VE HAD ANOTHER VISIT TO MY OFFICE BY THAT COSTUMED FREAK! I WANT OVERT-KILL OPERATIONAL ***A.S.A.P.!***

YOU SEE, MY GOOD MAN--

--I'M GOING TO CLEANSE MYSELF OF *TWO* RATHER LARGE NUISANCES THIS EVENING. *ONE* SHOULD BE NEARLY FINISHED.

THE *OTHER* SHOULD BE GETTING HIS INVITE TO TONIGHT'S PARTY RIGHT *NOW*.

YES, SIR.

PHONE MY OFFICE AS SOON AS HE'S MOBILE.

IN THE MEANTIME, I NEED TO CHECK UP ON ANOTHER OF MY... *SITUATIONS*. *

*SEE *VIOLATOR* MINI-SERIES, ISSUE 2 -- Tom

HOPELESS.

THAT'S HOW TERRY FEELS AT THE MOMENT. IN HIS RUSH TO GET HOME TO SEE IF HIS FAMILY IS ALRIGHT, HE'D FORGOTTEN THAT TODAY IS WHEN WANDA AND THE BABY GO TO VISIT GRANDMA BLAKE.

NORMALLY.

HE HASN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET THEM ON THE PHONE.

MAYBE THEY DIDN'T **MAKE IT?** MAYBE THEY'RE IN TROUBLE **ALREADY?** QUESTIONS RACE WILDLY THROUGH HIS MIND. HE CURSES HIS GROWING **PARANOIA.** AS A TRAINED SECURITY OPERATIVE, HE EXPECTS BETTER OF HIMSELF.

BUT NO.

ONLY ONE THOUGHT REPEATS.

please, be okay, wanda.

AGAIN, HE LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW. AGAIN, HE SEES AN UNMARKED CAR WITH TWO C.I.A. STIFFS.

HE'D SPOTTED THEM ON HIS FRANTIC DRIVE HOME.

THEY PARKED RIGHT OUT FRONT. IT'S OBVIOUS THEY WANT HIM TO KNOW HE'S BEING TOYED WITH.

HIS PARANOIA IS OBVIOUSLY NOT UNFOUNDED.

WHILE TERRY TRIES TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE SITUATION, A DARK SEDAN PULLS UP BEHIND THE C.I.A. VEHICLE.

THIS ONE BELONGS TO A COUPLE OF VITO GRAVANO'S LEGBREAKERS.

HEY! ANDY, ISN'T THAT A COUPLE OF *GRAVANO'S* GOONS?

DON'T TELL ME FITZGERALD'S IN CAHOOTS WITH THE MOB, *TOO?!* MAN, HE'S ***COMPLETELY*** FLIPPED SIDES!

JEEZ! LOOK AT THE ***HARDWARE*** THEY'RE PACKIN'! BETTER ***CALL IN***, PHIL!

WE DON'T HAVE *TIME!*

THE GOVERNMENT BOYS TAKE IMMEDIATE NOTICE.

FREEZE! NOW!

ANDY, GET ***ON*** THE ***RADIO!***

WHAT THE ***HELL--?***

IT'S THE **FEDS!!**

LET'S ***GET*** 'EM, LOUIE!

BUDDA BUDDA

BRAPAPAPAP

BRAAAP

TERRY **BOLTS** FROM HIS HOUSE, CARRYING HIS OWN HIGH-POWERED RIFLE. HE HAS TO **END** THIS MADNESS.

BRAAAAT!

VDDDDDT!

THIS IS NOT A RATIONAL MOVE.

GET OUT OF HERE!

ALL OF YOU-- JUST LEAVE!!

BAM BAM BAM

BDOW!

VIP VIP VIP

YOU GODDAMN TRAITOR!

NAIL HIM!

god help me...

BAM BAM BAM

VDDDDT! BRAAAT!

SPAK!

THANKS FOR THE PAUSE, IDIOTS!

VDDDDDT! VDDDDT!

UNGH!

SPT! SPT!

FINALLY, THE GUNS FALL SILENT.

LISTEN UP, FITZGERALD!! I KNOW YOU CAN HEAR US!

WE'VE GOT YOUR WIFE AND GIRL! IF YOU WANT TO SEE EITHER OF THEM AGAIN, YOU BE IN THE ALLEY BETWEEN FIFTH AND SIXTH AT 27th--

--AT MIDNIGHT!

AND YOU'D BETTER BE ALONE!

TIRES SCREECH AS THE CAR SPEEDS AWAY.

IT'S AT THIS MOMENT THAT TERRY'S WORLD BECOMES DEVOID OF REALITY. HE ISN'T AWARE THAT THE MAFIA WISEGUYS WERE **LYING.** WANDA, CYAN AND GRANDMA BLAKE WERE ACTUALLY AT A PARK, QUIETLY OBSERVED BY SOME OF GRAVANO'S MEN THEY CALLED THIS INFORMATION IN TO THE THUGS AT TERRY'S DOORSTEP, WHO WERE THEN TO PASS HIM THE BOGUS 'KIDNAP' STORY.

OF COURSE, TERRY WOULD IMMEDIATELY CHECK ON GRANDMA'S HOUSE.

OF COURSE, IT'D BE **EMPTY.**

THIS WOULD MAKE THE BLUFF THAT MUCH MORE **CONVINCING.**

WHAT THE MOBSTERS HADN'T FORSEEN WAS THE PRESENCE OF THE **C.I.A.**

THIS COMPLICATION WAS EASILY RESOLVED.

NOW, TERRY STANDS OVER THE TWO DEAD G-MEN. THE SECURITY AGENCIES HAD NOTHING BUT WYNN'S LIES TO FOLLOW UNTIL NOW. **NO WAY** THEY'LL BELIEVE A COUPLE OF HITMEN HAPPENED ALONG AND HAD A SHOOT-OUT ON HIS FRONT LAWN.

AS THE SOUND OF SIRENS DRAWS CLOSER, AND THE NEIGHBORS START TO PEEK THROUGH THEIR CURTAINS, TERRY DOES THE ONLY THING HE CAN THINK OF.

HE RUNS.

HOURS LATER...

AL!

HEY, AL!

puff

puff

HE'S COMING! JUST LIKE YOU SAID-- OVER ON SIXTH!

THEN THE FILES WERE CORRECT.

THE DOCUMENTS PROCURED BY SPAWN FROM VITO GRAVANO'S OFFICE HAD MENTIONED OVERT-KILL'S MIDNIGHT APPOINTMENT...

YOU'D BETTER *HURRY*, MAN, 'CAUSE SOME BLACK DUDE IN A *SUIT* IS RIGHT IN HIS SIGHTS.

TERRY?!

I DON'T KNOW WHO **HE** IS, BUT THAT *ROBOT'S* AS BIG AS A *BUS!*

HE DON'T STAND A *CHANCE.*

WHATEVER YOU'RE GOING TO DO-- PLEASE-- BE CAREFUL.

THIS IS SERIOUS.

THANKS FOR THE WARNING.

I'VE GOT A LITTLE **HELP** TUCKED AWAY.

IT'S PAST MIDNIGHT. WHAT'S *KEEPING* THESE PEOPLE?

Uh?

WHAT'S THAT?

!

NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, HERO.

Wanda. Cyan. I love you.

A SOFT WHISPER PASSES HIS LIPS AS HE PREPARES TO DIE.

DAMMIT! WHERE'D I PUT 'EM?!

KUNK

FAASH

PANIC.

KRASH

THMP

HE HAD BURIED THE TWO STEEL-PIERCING AK720/X1 PORTABLE CANNONS.

SPAWN KNEW THAT THEY MIGHT COME IN HANDY SOMEDAY, SO HE KEPT THE GUNS HIDDEN. ANYTHING SHARP, ROTTEN OR HEAVY ENOUGH TO DISCOURAGE IDLE CURIOSITY WAS USED AS CAMOUFLAGE.

THESE WEAPONS HAD DECIMATED OVERT-KILL ON THEIR FIRST GO-ROUND.* THEY'LL WORK A **SECOND** TIME--IF HE CAN FIND THEM.

*ISSUE 7--Tom

SPAWN REALIZES THAT EACH PASSING MOMENT IS KEEPING TERRY IN A POTENTIALLY FATAL POSITION.

THERE'S NO TIME FOR DELAY...

...ON ANY LEVEL.

DON'T MOVE.

GREAT WORK, TWITCH!

THANK YOU, SIR.

FELLAS... ... I DON'T NEED THIS RIGHT NOW.

TIME.

ONCE AGAIN IT BECOMES AN ENEMY TO SPAWN...

6 8 7

4

...AND TO HIS FRIENDS.

TO BE CONTINUED.

JASON WYNN: HEAD OF THE *UNITED STATES SECURITY GROUP*, THE HIGHEST-LEVEL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

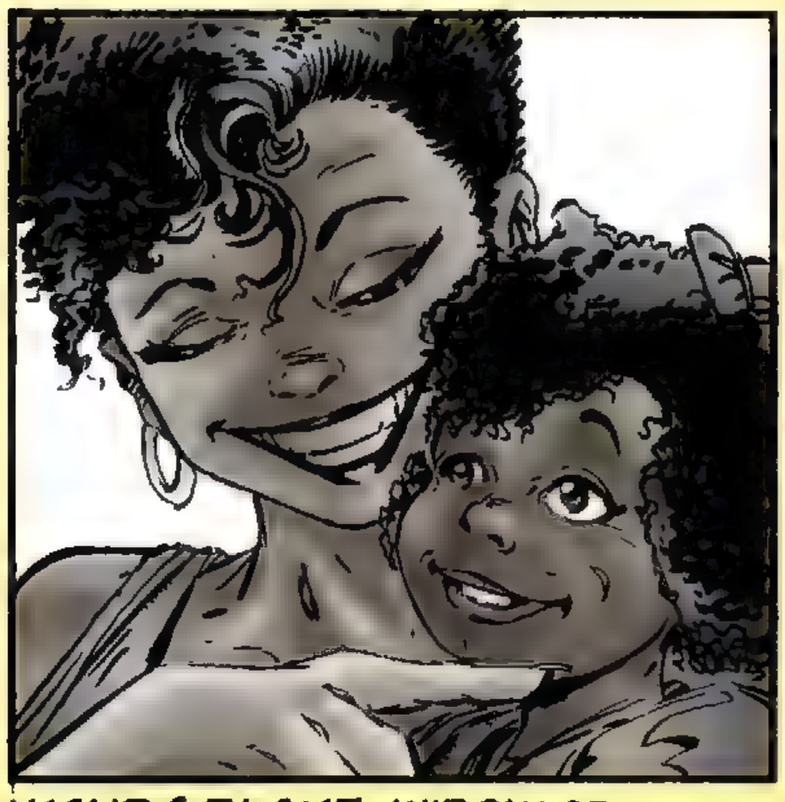
HIS SECURITY STATUS HAS BEEN COMPROMISED, AND THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE IS NOT PLEASED. WYNN IS UNDER PRESSURE TO RESTORE HIS REPUTATION IN THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY. TERRY FITZGERALD, A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCE, HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE SOURCE OF THE TENSION... AND IS NOW IN DANGER OF HIS LIFE, AT WYNN'S DIRECTION.

SPAWN: AGENT OF HELL.

HIS VERY EXISTENCE HAS SET INTO MOTION A CRAZY RIPPLE EFFECT, WITH INCREASINGLY DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THOSE AROUND HIM. SPAWN SIMPLY WANTS TO CREATE AND NURTURE A FAMILY, BUT THAT DESIRE HAS ALREADY DAMNED HIM AND NOW INADVERTANTLY THREATENS ALL WHO TRUST HIM.

VITO GRAVANO: MAFIA DON.

HIS OPERATIONS HAD RUN SMOOTHLY FOR YEARS, BUT LATELY AN UNKNOWN ATTACKER HAS SLAUGHTERED A NUMBER OF HIS MEN. GRAVANO HAS FOCUSED ON REMOVING THIS BLEMISH... SPAWN, HE BELIEVES... FROM THE FACE OF HIS CITY. HE IS UNAWARE THAT SOME OF THE INFORMATION DRIVING HIS HUNT IS INACCURATE.



WANDA BLAKE: WIDOW OF LT. COL. AL SIMMONS, *A.K.A.* SPAWN.

WANDA IS NOW HAPPILY MARRIED TO HER LATE HUSBAND'S BEST FRIEND, TERRY FITZGERALD, WITH WHOM SHE HAS A DAUGHTER, CYAN. SHE IS CURRENTLY UNAWARE OF AL'S LIFE STATUS, OR OF THE VICIOUS WEB IN WHICH TERRY IS RAPIDLY FINDING HIMSELF ENSNARED.

SAM BURKE: DETECTIVE, N.Y.P.D.

NOW CLEARED OF WRONGDOING IN THE DEATH OF CHILDKILLER BILLY KINCAID, BURKE IS ALLOWING HIMSELF THE LUXURY OF BRUTALITY IN THE NAME OF FACT GATHERING. SOMEONE *(OR SOMETHING)* CAUSED HIS SUPERIORS TO QUESTION HIS LOYALTY, AND HE WANTS TO HAVE WORDS WITH THIS INDIVIDUAL.

"TWITCH" WILLIAMS: DETECTIVE, N.Y.P.D.

THIS FATHER OF SEVEN IS ONE OF THE STATE'S TOP SHARPSHOOTERS. HIS SENSE OF FAIRNESS WORKS COUNTERPOINT TO HIS PARTNER BURKE'S OCCASIONAL LAPSES. METHODOLOGY AND ARM-TWISTING HAVE LED THE PAIR TO THEIR QUARRY-- THE COSTUMED MYSTERY MAN WHO HAS A FEW SERIOUS QUESTIONS TO ANSWER.

*THESE ARE THE MAJOR PLAYERS IN AN INCREASINGLY TWISTED GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE. EACH IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED TO THE STRANGE EXISTENCE OF A **DEAD MAN** BROUGHT BACK TO **LIFE**. STRIPPED OF HIS IDENTITY... CHARGED WITH TREMENDOUS BUT EXHAUSTABLE **POWER**... AWAKENED FIVE YEARS AFTER HIS TIME TO FIND HIS WIFE REMARRIED... THESE WERE THE REALITIES AWAITING A MAN IN LOVE--*

*--**GIFTS** GIVEN BY SOME UNHOLY **CREATURE OF HELL**.*

*A PRISONER OF HIS NEW LIFE ON EARTH, SPAWN'S ACTIONS HAVE TRIGGERED SEVERAL **MANHUNTS** BY VERY INFLUENCIAL PEOPLE. NONE IS PREPARED FOR WHAT **TRUTH** MAY EMERGE FROM THEIR INVESTIGATIONS...*

...AND THE UNFOLDING TRAGEDY IS THAT AN **INNOCENT MAN** IS THE PRIME SUSPECT.

THIS BRINGS US TO **TERRY FITZGERALD.**

THROUGH STRAINED CIRCUMSTANCES, HE HAS BECOME THE TARGET OF NUMEROUS GROUPS:

C.I.A.

POLICE.

F.B.I.

MAFIA.

ALL HAVE DETERMINED THAT HE IS AT THE ROOT OF THEIR PROBLEMS.

PLEASE-- I BEG YOU--!

EACH HAS ITS OWN **SPECIAL** WAY OF DEALING WITH SUCH ANNOYANCES.

GET ON YOUR FEET.

YOU WANT TO BE A *HERO*? THEN ACT LIKE IT. I CAME HERE TO *DESTROY* A MAN.

NOT SOME COWERING *DOG!*

I SAID, GET UP, HERO!!

SWAT!

*SINCE HIS RECONSTRUCTION, **OVERTKILL** HAS BEEN PROGRAMMED TO BELIEVE HE NOW FACES **SPAWN**, WHO NEARLY DESTROYED HIM A FEW WEEKS AGO.**

SPUCK!

*ISSUES 6 AND 7 --Tom.

OH, MY...

IT'S HAPPENING, JUST LIKE HE SAID.

I'VE GOTTA FIND AL.

HOW PATHETIC YOU'VE BECOME.

NOT FAR AWAY...

I DON'T CARE *WHAT* YOUR HURRY IS, BUD, IT'S TIME FOR US TO HAVE A LITTLE CHAT. NOW STEP AWAY FROM THE WALL.

WATCH HIM, TWITCH.

TAKEN CARE OF, SIR.

I'M NOT ABOUT TO MOVE FOR YOU...

LISTEN HERE, YOU FRIGGIN' *FREAK*...

...'CAUSE I'M LEAVING HERE, WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION.

YOU CAN EITHER FOLLOW AND HELP ME-- OR GET OUT OF MY WAY BEFORE I HURT YOU. THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

NO, YOU LISTEN!

I'VE GOT A FRIEND WHO'S IN DESPERATE NEED OF HELP AGAINST THE MAFIA'S CYBORG HITMAN... BECAUSE OF **FALSE INFORMATION** FROM C.I.A. AND F.B.I. OFFICIALS.

EVEN THE **POLICE** HAVE HELPED SCREW THIS UP. UNFORTUNATELY, I CAN'T FIND MY **WEAPONS** IN ALL THIS GARBAGE, SO I'LL HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE.

WHAT DO YOU THINK, SIR?

AIN'T NO *WAY* HE'S WALKING AWAY FROM US NOW!

HE'S BEEN A BLEEDING ULCER IN MY GUT FOR TOO *LONG*. I'M NOT GOING TO LET HIM SAVE HIS BUTT BY HIDING BEHIND SOME COCKAMAMIE STORY.

GO SCREW YOURSELF, FAT MAN.

I SAID YOU'RE WELCOME TO JOIN ME, BUT I GUARANTEE THAT THIS ROBOT ISN'T EVEN GOING TO **FEEL** THOSE PEA-SHOOTERS YOU'RE PACKING.

THAT'S WHY I WAS LOOKING FOR **MY** CANNONS.* WE NEED FIRE-POWER... **BIG** TIME.

* SEEN IN ISSUE 7 --Tom.

FREEZE, YOU MORON! BEFORE WE *SHOOT!*

SUDDENLY...

AL! AL!

IT'S HAPPENING! YOU'VE GOTTA *COME!*

GUY'S AS BIG AS A *HOUSE!* ALL SHINY AND NEW--! BUT THE GUY HE'S *POUNDING* AIN'T LIFTING A FINGER.

I THINK HE'S DEAD.

DAMMIT, NO.

SPAWN BOLTS, CURSING HIMSELF FOR THIS DELAY.

AS A GOVERNMENT ASSASSIN, HE WAS TRAINED TO STAY FOCUSED.

Uh?

Uh?

EMILY?!

IT'S OBVIOUS HE'S LOSING HIS EDGE.

TWITCH!
STOP HIM!

DETECTIVE WILLIAMS LINES UP HIS TARGET. SPAWN'S CHAOTIC MOVEMENTS DON'T DISTRACT HIM. NOR DOES THE FLOWING CAPE WHICH CONCEALS MOST OF HIS FORM. "TWITCH" WAITS FOR JUST THE RIGHT MOMENT.

KRAK!

THE SHOT IS A DIRECT HIT. TEARING THROUGH CARTILAGE AND SHATTERING A KNEECAP, IT'S THE FASTEST WAY TO DISABLE AN ASSAILANT.

SPAWN NEVER BREAKS STRIDE AS HE DISAPPEARS INTO THE UNLIT ALLEYWAY.

TWITCH -- I THOUGHT YOU--

I DID, SIR!

I DID!

SHOCK.

THEN REALITY SETS BACK IN. SAM AND TWITCH DART AFTER THE FLEEING HERO.

JEEZ!

THIS IS GETTING NUTS!

THAT DAUGHTER OF YOURS IS *REALLY* A JOY, WANDA

SO WELL BEHAVED. I WISH *MY* KIDS WERE THAT SWEET, GROWING UP.

THANKS, GRANNY.

I'M SORRY SHE FELL ASLEEP LIKE THAT, BUT SHE DOES LOVE GOING OUT TO THE PARK AND PLAYING. RUNS HERSELF INTO THE GROUND.

HOPE YOU DON'T MIND ALL THE TIME WE SPENT THERE.

Oh-- *HEAVENS*, NO!

IT JUST MEANS I GET TO ENJOY YOUR COMPANY A FEW MORE HOURS.

YOUR VISITS ARE THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY WEEK, DEAR. YOU KNOW THAT.

OTHERWISE IT'S MOSTLY QUIET AROUND HERE-- ALTHOUGH I *DID* HAVE A BIT OF A SURPRISE NOT LONG AGO--

AL CAME TO VISIT ME.*

WHA--?!

HE'S AN *ANGEL* NOW. HE SEEMED A BIT TROUBLED, THOUGH. HE ASKED ABOUT YOU.

SAID HE STILL LOVES YOU.

GRANNY? HOW COULD AL COME TO...

*ISSUE 12-- Tom.

BRIINGG!

OH, COULD YOU GET THAT FOR ME, DEAR?

Um...

SURE. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

BRIINGG!

HELLO.

WANDA!

THIS IS CONNIE! YOU NEED TO GET HOME! TWO MEN HAVE BEEN KILLED ON YOUR FRONT LAWN!

*THE POLICE SAID **TERRY** KILLED THEM!!*

MR. WYNN.

WE'VE JUST RECEIVED WORD THAT TWO F.B.I. AGENTS WERE SLAIN OUTSIDE THE HOME OF TERRY FITZGERALD.

THE HOUSE WAS UNDER SURVEILLANCE DUE TO INFORMATION PROVIDED THE BUREAU FROM THIS OFFICE.

OUR AGENTS WERE ABLE TO GET THERE AHEAD OF THE POLICE, BUT THE SITUATION IS GROWING RATHER TENSE.

THE F.B.I. OPERATIVES WERE KILLED BY TWO GUNMEN, MOST LIKELY FROM THE MAFIA.

WHETHER FITZGERALD HAS MOB CONNECTIONS HAS NOT BEEN DETERMINED AT THIS TIME.

SO FAR, FITZGERALD IS IN THE CLEAR.

JASON WYNN CLENCHES HIS TEETH. POLITICAL PRESSURE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE IS UNRELENTING. WYNN MUST BRING THIS CASE TO A CLOSE. HE WILL STICK THE CASE TO HIS PATSY, TERRY FITZGERALD.

ANY MISSTEP AT THIS STAGE WILL END WYNN'S CAREER. OF THIS HE IS KEENLY AWARE.

THE WITCH-HUNT WILL CONTINUE.

UNFORTUNATELY, FITZGERALD WAS NOT BEHIND THE SECURITY BREACHES WHICH EMBARASSED WYNN-- AND WYNN KNOWS IT.

*NOW, HIS UGLY TACTICS HAVE **BACKFIRED**, AND TWO F.B.I. AGENTS ARE **DEAD**. WYNN WEIGHS HIS CHOICES COLDLY.*

GET TO THE NEIGHBORS.

NOW.

ACROSS TOWN...

WHAT WERE YOU THINKING ?!!

BOSS... WE HAD NO IDEA THAT THE FEDS WOULD BE...

QUIET!

LISTEN. I'M ONLY GOING TO SAY THIS *ONCE*. YOUR ORDERS WERE TO GET FITZGERALD TO A RENDEZVOUS WITH OVERT-KILL.

PERIOD!

...*NOT* TO KILL TWO F.B.I. AGENTS!* I DON'T *NEED* THAT KIND OF ATTENTION.

THE CARTEL'S ALREADY BUSTING MY BALLS!

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

I'VE GOT ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY.* YOU GO BACK OUT THERE AND MAKE THIS GO AWAY. AND I DON'T MEAN A *LITTLE* BIT, I MEAN *ALL* OF IT!

CAPICE?

YES, SIR...

GOOD...

*VIOLATOR MINI-SERIES, ISSUE 3 --Tom.

"... I HOPE FITZGERALD WAS DUMB ENOUGH TO RUSH RIGHT OVER FOR THAT LITTLE 'BUSINESS MEETING.'"

KA-K!

HE WAS.

FINE.

THEN I HOPE YOU WON'T MIND IF I JUST CARRY ON IN SPITE OF YOU--

--LIKE SEEING HOW FINE POWDER I CAN CRUSH FROM YOUR BONES--

--WITHOUT SPLITTING YOUR BODY OPEN!

HAVE IT YOUR WAY, HERO. YOU DON'T WANT TO FIGHT...?

UNGH!

FROM DENSE SHADOWS COMES A CRIMSON BLUR.

ITS MOVEMENTS ARE QUICK. DELIBERATE.

MOVING WITH SPECIFIC INTENT, IT SNATCHES TERRY'S BATTERED BODY...

...AND TOUCHES DOWN 20 FEET AWAY, KNEE DEEP IN GARBAGE.

HEY!

STAY HERE.

I'LL HANDLE THIS.

=cough= NO...

GOTTA SAVE 'EM...

FOOL!

YOU'RE A *DEAD MAN.*

INTERNAL BLEEDING. CRACKED RIBS. FRACTURED JAW. NONE OF THESE MATTER TO TERRY AS HE SPRINTS FOR THE STREETS. HE STILL BELIEVES THE MAFIA HAVE HIS WIFE AND CHILD.

THEIR BLUFF HAD WORKED.

HA HA HA HA HA

*YET FOR ALL HIS EFFORT, TERRY IS ONLY HUMAN-- NOT NEARLY **FAST** ENOUGH TO OUTRUN A **BIO-LASER STREAM.***

TERRY. NO!

BEFORE SPAWN CAN MOVE, HIS **CAPE** DOES. TO THIS POINT, HIS COSTUME HAD ONLY COME TO LIFE WHILE PROTECTING ITS **HOST.**

TONIGHT, IT SENSED A **FURTHER** USE.

ZAT!

SPAWN GRABS A STRAY TWO-BY-FOUR. HE KNOWS IT CAN CAUSE NO DAMAGE... BUT IT **CAN** OFFER A SLIGHT DISTRACTION...

...ONE THAT WILL ALLOW TERRY TO **ESCAPE.**

SWAK!

FINALLY! MY **PROPER** TARGET. WITHOUT YOUR **GUN**...

...YOU'RE **NOTHING!**

puff! puff

CRIPES!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?!

I =puff= DON'T KNOW, SIR--

KRAK!

POW!

SMET!

"... BUT OBVIOUSLY HE WASN'T LYING TO US."

"CRAP!

"THAT MEANS THE REST OF HIS STORY'S *PROBABLY* TRUE, TWITCH.

"WHICH MEANS THERE JUST MAY BE A MULTI-AGENCY MANHUNT GOING ON.

"JUST MY *LUCK.*"

ZAT!

"SIR?"

"YEAH! YEAH! I'M THINKING!"

"WE CAN'T AFFORD THAT MUCH *TIME*...

...BECAUSE UNLESS WE TERMINATE THIS BATTLE, WE'RE NOT GOING TO GET *ANY* ANSWERS FROM THIS "*AL*" GUY!

CAR'S TOO FAR AWAY FOR US TO RADIO IN. SO-- WE'VE ONLY GOT ONE CHOICE--

--*SHOOT!*

PING

PING

PING

TIME TO *POP* THAT ZIT YOU CALL A HEAD.

TIRES SCREECH. A DOOR SNAPS OPEN. OUT BOLTS **WANDA BLAKE.**

DURING THE DRIVE HOME SHE WAS IN A NEAR **FRENZY** OVER WHAT SHE'D BEEN TOLD. MAYBE **THIS** PART WAS TRUE... OR THAT... OR **THAT.** BUT **TERRY...?** NO. SOMETHING **IS WRONG** HERE.

HEY LADY! MY FARE!!

MS. BLAKE!

MS. BLAKE!!

AS SHE NEARS THE CLUSTER OF POLICE, REPORTERS AND GAWKERS HER **HEART** SKIPS A BEAT, THEN CONTINUES TO POUND LIKE IT'S ABOUT TO **EXPLODE.**

IS IT TRUE YOUR HUSBAND KILLED

F.B.I.

TRAITOR

FLED THE SCENE

MURDER

SHE'S ASSAULTED WITH A HUNDRED QUESTIONS AND THIRTY VERSIONS OF THE EVENTS. SIMULTANEOUSLY.

EXCUSE ME, FOLKS. LET ME PASS.

MS. BLAKE!

MS. BLAKE!

I'M SORRY, MA'AM. THINGS DON'T LOOK GOOD RIGHT NOW. I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO COME DOWN TO THE STATION.

THERE'S BEEN A MULTIPLE MURDER, AND NO SIGN OF YOUR HUSBAND. WE'VE PUT OUT AN A.P.B. CALLING FOR HIS ARREST...

No!

PLEASE!

NOT *TERRY!*

NOT MY *TERRY!*

IT *CAN'T* BE!

SPOTTING A HANDFUL OF NEIGHBORS HUDDLED ACROSS THE STREET, WANDA RACES TO THEM.

PLEASE!

YOU MUST HAVE SEEN SOMETHING! ANYTHING!

PLEASE, YOU'VE GOT TO HELP. THIS CAN'T BE TRUE!

THIS CAN'T BE TRUE

MR. HORNE?

ANNE?

WE'VE SEEN NOTHING.

I'M SORRY.

WANDA IS FAR TOO LATE. JASON WYNN'S MEN HAD ALREADY "CONSULTED" WITH HER NEIGHBORS.

YOU SEE, ANDREW AND KAREN HORNE THESE KIND AND GENEROUS PEOPLE, WERE ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS.

AN INSURANCE ADJUSTER FOR OVER SEVENTEEN YEARS, CHRIS ALBRECHT LED A FAIRLY MUNDANE LIFE.

FOR THREE YEARS IN THE MID-SEVENTIES, THOUGH, HE DIDN'T FILE HIS INCOME TAX FORMS. AN AUDIT AT THIS TIME WOULD RUIN HIM.

AS FOR ANNE THOMOPOULOS, SHE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLEASANT NEIGHBOR. NICE FAMILY, TOO. BUT SHE HAS A SKELETON IN HER CLOSET.

SHE HAD A CHILD OUT OF WEDLOCK--A SON-- WHEN SHE WAS SEVENTEEN. AT PRESENT HE IS IN JAIL FOR CAR THEFT. HIS PAROLE HEARING IS IN TWO MONTHS. SHE'S BEEN PROMISED HIS FREEDOM.

AS THE FINAL DOOR IS LATCHED, SHE FALLS TO HER KNEES, SOBBING.

WANDA NEVER WANTED TO ADMIT IT TO HERSELF, BUT SHE ALWAYS **KNEW** THIS DAY WOULD COME. BEING A WIDOW TO ONE GOVERNMENT INTELLIGENCE AGENT WASN'T ENOUGH, SHE HAD TO GO MARRY **ANOTHER**. SHE'D ACTED AS IF, BY KEEPING A SAFE DISTANCE FROM THEIR WORK, SHE WOULD SHIELD THEM ALL FROM ANY CONSEQUENCES OF... WELL, WHATEVER THAT WORK **WAS**. "IGNORANCE IS BLISS," SHE'D TOLD HERSELF.

THAT ILLUSION HAS JUST BEEN SHATTERED... **TERMINALLY**. WANDA KNOWS SHE'D'VE SEEN WARNING LIGHTS FLASHING IF ONLY SHE'D OPENED HER EYES A BIT WIDER.

SHE SAYS A QUICK PRAYER FOR HER CHILD, WHO'S BEEN LEFT... THANK GOD... AT GRANNY BLAKE'S.

THEN, SHE BREAKS DOWN **AGAIN**, HER BODY JERKING WITH EACH BREATH.

TRAGICALLY, HER PRIVACY IS SHORT-LIVED AS THE ASSEMBLED NEWSHOUNDS POUNCE, FEEDING ON HER GRIEF.

MEANWHILE...

NO. I CAN'T JUST LEAVE HIM.

HE SAVED =ungh= MY LIFE!

WAVES OF PAIN SHOOTING THROUGH HIS BODY, TERRY MANAGES TO PUSH AN EMPTY DUMPSTER DOWN THE ALLEY.

HE WON'T ABANDON THE COSTUMED VIGILANTE.

WITH EACH AGONIZING STEP, **MOMENTUM** IS BUILT--

-- JUST ENOUGH TO **TOPPLE** A 1200-LB. CYBORG THAT WAS ALREADY OFF-BALANCE.

WHA--?!

WHAK!

UNFFK

IDIOT! I THOUGHT YOU'D FLED!

WERE YOU WAITING FOR YOUR FRIEND? ***HERE*** HE IS!

WHAT'RE YA ***DOIN'***, TWITCH? YOUR GUN'S ***USELESS!***

I'VE GOT AN IDEA, SIR.

SPCH!

TURN.

KRAK

C'MON, BABY, TURN.

BINGO.

SMAT!

BLAM!

WITH UNCANNY ACCURACY, THE BULLET ENTERS OVERTKILL'S BODY THROUGH A SMALL OPENING IN THE EAR CAVITY...

!

...INTERRUPTING THE ELECTRIC FLOW FOR A NANOSECOND.

TWITCH HAD HOPED TO CAUSE SOME SYSTEMIC DISRUPTION.

THE RESULT WAS COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED.

YOUNGBLOOD. BADROCK. YOUNGBLOOD. BADROCK. BADROCK.

THE CYBORG LUMBERS OFF. IT HAS A NEW DIRECTIVE.*

*SEE YOUNGBLOOD #17 -- Tom. !

WHAT A BLOODY MESS.

QUITE LITERALLY.

ISSUE 24

IT'S BEEN A VERY STRANGE NIGHT FOR DETECTIVE SAM BURKE. WHILE HUNTING THE MYSTERIOUS COSTUMED VIGILANTE RESPONSIBLE FOR BURKE'S TEMPORARY SUSPENSION FROM THE POLICE FORCE, BURKE AND HIS PARTNER-- "TWITCH" WILLIAMS-- UNEXPECTEDLY FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE MIDDLE OF A MUCH BIGGER SCENARIO.

VARIOUS SOURCES LED THEM TO THE LAIR OF A HERO REVERED BY THE HOMELESS OF NEW YORK'S BOWERY. THEY CAUGHT HIM OFF-GUARD AS HE PREPARED FOR A SHOWDOWN TWO MILES UPTOWN WITH THE MAFIA'S CYBORG HITMAN, OVERTKILL. SPAWN EVADED THE PURSUIT.

THE LAWMEN LATER CAUGHT UP WITH SPAWN AS HIS BATTLE REACHED ITS CLIMAX. WILLIAMS' SHARPSHOOTING SAVED SPAWN'S LIFE-- AND THAT OF ONE OTHER. ALSO LYING IN A BLOODY HEAP WAS AN UNIDENTIFIED CIVILIAN.

AS BURKE STARES DOWN AT THE TWO BROKEN FIGURES, HE MUTTERS HIS PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT:

CRIPES! THE PAPERWORK ON THIS IS GONNA KILL ME.

SO IT WOULD SEEM, SIR.

IT'S OBVIOUS THAT HE'S NOT EVEN REMOTELY AWARE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF WHAT'S JUST HAPPENED.

HE'LL CATCH ON SOON ENOUGH.

KNEELING OVER SPAWN'S LIMP FORM, 'TWITCH' CHECKS FOR ANY SIGNS OF LIFE. IT'D BE A SHAME TO HAVE COME THIS FAR AND END UP WITHOUT ANY ANSWERS.

THE SEARCH HAS BECOME TOO PERSONAL TO GO UNRESOLVED.

SO... WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

HE MIGHT BE DEAD.

I'M NOT FINDING A PULSE.

I'LL TRY SOME C.P.R.

THE MASK IS DRAWN BACK, REVEALING WHAT'S LEFT OF THE MAN CALLED AL SIMMONS.

JEEZUS!!

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO HIM?!

MY GOD.

IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE BURNED HIS FACE OFF. GOD... WHAT'S THIS GUY *BEEN* THROUGH?

IF WHAT HE SAID WAS TRUE,* A WHOLE *LOT.*

AL?

"AL"... THE RE-ANIMATED DEAD MAN... HAS BEEN HUNTED AS A VIGILANTE AND A MURDERER. AS A SPAWN OF HELL, HE IS LESS THAN THAT-- AND **MORE.**

TERRY FITZGERALD ROLLS OVER. THE DETECTIVES ASSUME HE'S A BUSINESSMAN. IN FACT, HE WORKS AS A LINGUIST FOR THE C.I.A.

THE ONLY OTHER THING WE'VE GOT IS THAT THE BAG LADY CALLED HIM "*AL.*"

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

AL?

THE DETECTIVES HAD BEEN SO ENGROSSED WITH SPAWN THEY'D MOMENTARILY FORGOTTEN ABOUT HIM.

SO! YOU'RE *ALIVE,* BUD! *GOOD*-- 'CAUSE I'VE GOT ABOUT TWO HUNDRED QUESTIONS I NEED ANSWERED.

URK!

...LIKE, *WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?!*

AFTER A FEW MINUTES A PATROL CAR HAPPENS UPON THE SCENE. BURKE THEN RADIOS INTO THE NEAREST PRECINCT.

I'LL NEED A COUPLE AMBULANCES AND A FEW OF YOUR BOYS TO CORDON OFF THIS AREA.

ALSO...

BOYS, WE JUST GOT *LUCKY.*

A COUPLE DETECTIVES FROM DOWNTOWN SAY THEY'VE GOT THAT FITZGERALD GUY, AND THEY DON'T SEEM TO KNOW ANY-THING ABOUT HIM MURDER-ING THOSE *FEDS.**

I'LL PHONE LOU AT THE AGENCY--TELL HIM TO PASS THE WORD.

GET FOUR UNITS DOWN THERE. I'M GOING TO STEAL THIS COLLAR OUT FROM UNDER THEIR NOSES.

-- GET ME EVERYTHING YOU HAVE ON A *FITZGERALD, TERENCE D.* HE SAYS HE'S WITH THE *C.I.A.*, THOUGH HE AIN'T GOT A WALLET TO PROVE IT.

THANKS.

*ISSUE 22 - Tom.

IT'LL BE A PLEASURE TO FINALLY NAIL THAT *TRAITOR.*

YOU WANTED TO SEE US, *MR. WYNN?*

NOT LONG AFTER, AT THE OMNI-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, THE UNITED STATES SECURITY GROUP...

THEY'VE FOUND FITZGERALD, DOWN NEAR PENN STATION. I WANT OUR PEOPLE DOWN THERE *NOW.*

ONCE THERE, *PULL RANK.*

HE'S *OURS!*

THIS TIME I'M GOING TO *FRY* THAT SONUVABITCH.

YOU MAKE SURE THAT AREA IS SO TIGHT THAT THE *WIND* CAN'T EVEN GET OUT.

I WON'T LOSE HIM AGAIN.

JASON WYNN HAS BECOME CONSUMED WITH THIS CASE.

HIS FAUX PAS OVER TERRY FITZGERALD THREATENS HIS CAREER.

HE KNOWS FITZGERALD IS NO TRAITOR, BUT CIRCUMSTANCES MADE HIM THE LOGICAL SUSPECT. RATHER THAN ADMIT HIS ERROR, WYNN CONTINUES TO CONDUCT A BRUTAL INVESTIGATION.

POLICE, F.B.I., ... ALL ARE CALLED INTO PLAY.

AND... IF HE SO MUCH AS LOOKS AT YOU CROSSEYED, MAKE SURE HIS *DEATH* LOOKS LIKE AN *ACCIDENT*.

DO YOU READ ME?

PERFECTLY, SIR.

ANYTHING ELSE?

JUST DO IT.

WYNN'S CALLOUSNESS IS A BYPRODUCT OF YEARS OF UNQUESTIONED AUTHORITY.

AS SUPREME DIRECTOR OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES, HE HAS SINGLE-HANDEDLY **ENDED WARS**... EVEN SOME HE **BEGAN**.

TERRY FITZGERALD IS ONLY **ONE MAN**. HIS LIFE MEANS **NOTHING** TO A DICTATOR WHOSE EFFECTIVENESS IS BEING QUESTIONED.

A QUICK RESOLUTION TO THIS FIASCO WILL RESTORE HIS PREEMINANCE WITH THE **WHITE HOUSE**, AND IN THE **GLOBAL COMMUNITY**...

...WHILE LEAVING IT TO **OTHERS** TO DEAL WITH ITS AFTERMATH...

LIKE WANDA BLAKE, WIFE OF A MAN NOW ACCUSED ALSO OF MURDERING TWO F.B.I. AGENTS

TEARS FALL AS SHE PRAYS THAT THIS IS JUST SOME DEMENTED NIGHTMARE... BUT SHE KNOWS THAT IT'S REAL.

VERY REAL.

THE LIFE SHE AND TERRY HAD BUILT HAS CRASHED DOWN AROUND HER, AS WANDA NOW HOLDS TIGHT TO HER DAUGHTER CYAN. SHE WORKS TO PUSH PAST THE SHOCK— TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S IN HER HEART.

HOPE.

LOVE.

SHE PRAYS TO GOD THAT THIS WILL BE ENOUGH TO SEE HER THROUGH...

...BECAUSE IT SEEMS NOTHING SHE TOOK FOR GRANTED CAN BE TRUSTED.

THE AGENTS POSTED OUTSIDE ARE SUPPOSEDLY THERE TO **PROTECT** HER... BUT FROM **WHO?** OR IS SHE BEING **DETAINED?** THE NEIGHBORS STOPPED TALKING TO HER AFTER THE SHOOTOUT. WHO WERE THEY ***AFRAID*** OF?

WHAT **WAS** TERRY INVOLVED IN?

SHE DOESN'T KNOW FRIEND FROM FOE.

...HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU-- I DON'T *KNOW* WHERE THAT FRIGGIN' ROBOT WENT.*

YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE. I WAS JUST TRYING TO STAY *ALIVE*.

I WAS EXPECTING TO BE MEETING HERE WITH A COUPLE OF MAFIA PUNKS.

*WE DO. SEE YOUNGBLOOD #7-- Tom.

YEAH YEAH.

LET'S SEE IF I GOT THIS STRAIGHT... YOU'RE A G-MAN WHO'S EXPECTING A MEETING WITH THE MOB. THEY *SUCKER* YOU, SEND THEIR TEN-TON CYBORG HITMAN INSTEAD.

AND...

...OUR *DEAD HERO* OVER THERE SEEMS TO HAVE A *PERSONAL* REASON TO TRY AND SAVE YOUR BUTT.

ALL OF THIS COMES AS A *COMPLETE* SURPRISE TO YOU.

ON TOP OF IT ALL, YOU CLAIM TO HAVE LOST ALL YOUR IDENTIFI-CATION.

WHADDYA THINK, TWITCH?

THERE DOES SEEM TO BE SOME MERIT TO WHAT HE'S SAYING, SIR.

HE KNOWS THE AGENCY PROTOCOLS AND A FAIR BIT ABOUT THE MAFIA, AS WELL...

WILL YOU SHUT *UP*, TWITCH.

Psst! VINNIE! *LOOK*-- IT'S *AL!* SOMEONE MESSED HIM UP.

REAL *BAD*.

WE'VE GOTTA GET SOME HELP.

SO, ANOTHER GROUP IS DRAWN INTO THE WEB OF ACTIVITY SURROUNDING SPAWN, BECAUSE OUR NAIVE HERO ACTED WITHOUT THOUGHT OF CONSEQUENCE.

A DEAD CHILD MOLESTER.

A FEW STOLEN GUNS.

A COUPLE OF MISSING FILES.

THESE EVENTS FORM NO OBVIOUS PATTERN. THE KEY LIES IN AN UNFATHOMABLE PLACE:

...THE MIND OF A DEAD, C.I.A.-TRAINED ASSASSIN.

FACED WITH ODD SITUATIONS, SPAWN DID WHAT HAD TO BE DONE. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FALLOUT FROM HIS ACTIONS HAS LANDED SQUARELY ON THE SHOULDERS OF HIS BEST FRIEND OF A LIFETIME AGO.

YOU JUST SETTLE DOWN, BUDDY. THE OTHER COPS WILL BE HERE SOON.

BELIEVE US, TERRY, WE'RE JUST AS ANXIOUS TO FIGURE THIS OUT AS YOU ARE.

YOU GUYS HAVE TO BELIEVE ME... I DON'T HAVE TIME!

THE MAFIA'S GOT MY WIFE AND KID!!

I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! NOW!

LISTEN, PAL! I DON'T CARE WHAT YOUR PROBLEM IS. YOU AIN'T GOING NOWHERE.

UNDER-STAND?!

PLEASE, SIR, TAKE IT EASY.

BACK OFF, TWITCH! THIS ONE'S BEEN DOGGING ME TOO LONG FOR ME TO LET IT FALL APART NOW!

ARE YOU DEAF?! DIDN'T YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID-- IT'S THE MOB, YOU IDIOT!! THEY'LL KILL THEM!

Oh, NO. NOT AGAIN...!

FREEZE!

THEY'VE GOT MY WIFE AND LITTLE GIRL! *

WANDA...?

* IT WAS ACTUALLY JUST A BLUFF. SEE ISSUE 22 -- Tom.

IN THE SPRAWLING OFFICE OF NEW YORK MAFIA CHIEF VITO GRAVANO TENSIONS ARE RUNNING HIGH. THOUGH HE LIVED THROUGH HIS ORDEAL WITH THE **VIOLATOR** AND HIS BROTHER DEMONS*, IT ENDED FAR FROM SATISFACTORILY.

AND NOW THE HEAT'S BEEN TURNED UP. TWO OF HIS BOYS, TAKEN BY SURPRISE, SHOT AND KILLED A PAIR OF FEDERAL AGENTS ON THE FRONT LAWN OF TERRY FITZGERALD'S HOUSE.

OUT OF RESPECT FOR EACH OTHERS' INFLUENCE, THE TWO GROUPS HAVE LONG HAD A "SPECIAL" WORKING RELATIONSHIP. VITO IS LUCKY THAT EVERYONE IS STILL BLAMING FITZGERALD.

HE CAN THANK **JASON WYNN** FOR THAT.

I SENT FRANKIE AND TOMMY BACK TO THE MURDER SCENE.

THEY'RE MAKING SURE WE STAY CLEAN THROUGH ALL THIS.

RING RING

AND US?

I WANT YOU TO MAKE SURE ***OVERTKILL*** DID HIS JOB. I NEED FITZGERALD ***DEAD***. THE CARTEL HAS BEEN--

RING RING

*VIOLATOR MINI-SERIES.- Tom.

YES?

THIS IS GINO. WE'VE JUST CALLED A MEETING FOR NEXT THURSDAY. SOME OF THE MEMBERS HAVE REQUESTED A PROGRESS REPORT. THERE'S BEEN UNHAPPINESS WITH YOUR RECENT DEALINGS.

YOU'VE GOT SIX DAYS TO CORRECT THIS, UNDERSTAND?

WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU, VITO.

CLICK

PERFECT!!

GRAVANO IS NOT USED TO BEING ON THE RECEIVING END OF THREATS.

NOR WILL HE ALLOW IT TO CONTINUE.

SLAM!

SEND SOMEONE OVER TO GINO'S RESTAURANT. TAKE HIS TOP CHEF AND SLICE OFF HIS HANDS.

GINO NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND WHO *RUNS* THIS SHOW.

IN THE MEANTIME, I WANT FITZGERALD'S BODY. TELL OVERTKILL TO LEAVE ENOUGH OF IT INTACT FOR ME TO TAKE TO MY MEETING ON THURSDAY.

THAT SHOULD SHUT THEM UP.

UNFORTUNATELY FOR VITO, THAT MAY NOT BE AS EASY AS IT SEEMS. RIGHT NOW, FITZGERALD IS A VERY HOT COMMODITY.

THE POLICE BELIEVE HE'S IN POSSESSION OF STOLEN EXPERIMENTAL FIREARMS. THE F.B.I. SUSPECT HIM OF KILLING TWO OF THEIR AGENTS.

THE C.I.A. IS PRODDING THESE DOMESTIC AGENCIES AT WYNN'S "REQUEST."

GRAVANO'S GOONS ARE THEN RACING HEADLONG TO A PLACE THAT WILL SOON BE CRAWLING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS.

ADDING TO THE FRAY WILL BE EVERY LOCAL MEDIA CREW THAT'S BEEN MONITORING THE POLICE BANDS.

THIS IS NOT GOING TO BE THE EASIEST TIME TO BE TERRY FITZGERALD.

NEWS

6

THOUGH DETECTIVE SAM BURKE HAS HAD A VERY SUCCESSFUL CAREER, ONE POINT CANNOT BE DENIED: HE'S AN OVERWEIGHT SLOB.

FOR HIM, "PURSUING A SUSPECT ON FOOT" IS A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS. THAT'S WHY HE WAS TEAMED WITH SCRAWNY "TWITCH" WILLIAMS...

...TO WHOM IT FALLS (YET AGAIN) TO CATCH UP WITH A FLEEING PERPETRATOR (ALLEGED).

puff

puff

PRECINCT BY PRECINCT, THE QUESTION HAS BEEN ASKED, "WHY DO THEY CALL HIM 'TWITCH'?"

puff

THE ANSWER:

"BECAUSE HE *DOESN'T!*"

IT'S OVER, TERRY.

ACCEPT IT.

TERRY SLUMPS TO THE GROUND, A BROKEN MAN. PUTTING HIS HEAD INTO HIS HANDS, HE BEGINS TO SOB. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHY ANY OF THIS IS HAPPENING. THINGS ARE SO OUT OF WHACK.

BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE HAS FAILED HIS WIFE AND CHILD. THAT IS MORE THAN HE CAN BEAR.

WANDA, PLEASE FORGIVE ME.

YOU ≥huff≤ GOT 'IM! GREAT... WORK...! ≥huff-ff≤

I... THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO HAVE ≥huff≤ A HEART... ATTACK...

GOOD FOR YOU, SIR.

I'M GETTING *SICK* AND *TIRED* OF THIS!! WE'RE GOING BACK TO YOUR DEAD HERO BUDDY. I'LL BRING THE LOCAL COPS UP TO DATE, THEN I'M TAKING YOU IN TO THE STATION DOWNTOWN.

IF YOU SO MUCH AS *FLINCH*, I'LL SHOOT YOU MYSELF.

THERE THEY ARE.

KUNK!

HEY!

GET OUT OF HERE! GET OUT OF OUR ALLEY! *OUT* OF OUR *ALLEY!*

*THEY STAND POISED IN THE MOONLIGHT, READY TO TAKE BACK WHAT IS THEIRS--READY TO DEFEND THEIR FALLEN KING: **SPAWN.***

CANS. BOTTLES. WOOD. WHATEVER. THEY PELT THE TWO DETECTIVES RELENTLESSLY. TERRY SEES ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO FLEE.

NOW DISTANCED FROM THE POLICE, HE'S SPOTTED BY THE FIRST GROUP ON THE SCENE -- THE C.I.A.

SAY GOODNIGHT, TRAITOR.

THE PROVERBIAL 'PEDAL' IS PUT TO THE 'METAL.'

SIR, WE NEED TO FALL BACK!

I KNOW! I KNOW!

YOU GRAB *FITZY!* I'LL *COVER* YOU!

EVERYONE'S GOING *CRAZY* TONIGHT!

TERRY TURNS TO RUN.

TOO LATE.

HE STANDS FROZEN, STARING AT THE HEAD-LIGHTS LIKE SOME WILD ANIMAL ON THE HIGHWAY.

HE KNOWS HIS LUCK HAS FINALLY RUN OUT.

SLASH

THE PAIR DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HIT THEM. **THEY** HIT SOMETHING AT 67 M.P.H.

GET DOWN, TERRY!

THE ENGINE THAT RAMMED INTO THE PASSENGER COMPARTMENT, SHATTERING THEIR LEGS, CAME AS A COMPLETE **SURPRISE.** SHOULDER HARNESSES **WOULD'VE** KEPT THEM FROM FLYING THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD IF THEIR PINNED LEGS HADN'T. NEITHER OCCUPANT WILL WALK AGAIN.

THE **CAR** WILL LOOK AS IF IT IMPACTED A **STEEL POLE.** FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, IT **DID.**

AL SIMMONS EMPLOYS POWERS DERIVED FROM THE PITS OF **HELL.** ONCE IN A WHILE, HE'S GLAD OF IT. HE KNEW THAT INCREASING HIS DENSITY TO THIS EXTENT WOULD DRAIN IRREPLACABLE ENERGY. TONIGHT, HE DID THIS WILLINGLY.

TONIGHT, HE SAVED A **FRIEND.**

SIR! IT'S... HIM!
WHO ARE YOU?
A FRIEND.
TWITCH? YOU SAID...
SUDDENLY, THE ALLEY **EXPLODES** WITH LIFE. THE INTERESTED PARTIES CONVERGE IN RAPID SUCCESSION. FIRST, THE F.B.I.
FREEZE!
THEN THE **POLICE**.
FOLLOWED BY THE **MOB**. THEN THE **C.I.A.**
AND LAST, THE MEDIA CREWS.
THE COMMOTION IS **DEAFENING**. PANIC HAS BLOSSOMED, FULL AND ABUNDANT. IT IS NOW THAT THE DENIZENS OF THE ALLEY MAKE THEIR **RETREAT**-- NOT OUT OF FEAR, BUT **CONFIDENCE**. THEIR KING IS WELL.
HE **CAN** AND **WILL** CONTROL THIS SITUATION.
UNLIKE SOME FOLKS.
WHAT THE *HELL'S* GOING ON HERE?!

AS THE HORDE CONVERGES UPON HIM, SPAWN STANDS AND STARES. HIS C.I.A. BACKGROUND INFORMS HIS DECISIONS: **WHEN** TO REACT, AND **HOW**. HE HAS SEVERAL TARGETS TONIGHT. ONE PURPOSE.

UNTIL NOW, HE TRIED HIDING HIMSELF FROM THE PUBLIC.

THAT HASN'T WORKED VERY WELL.

FEAR.

IT CAN BE BROUGHT ON IN MANY WAYS: IRRATIONAL THOUGHT. PARANOIA. SUPER-STITION.

IT CAN ALSO BE INSTITUTED BY **EXAMPLE**.

HE'S BEEN GIVEN A NAME BY THE VIOLATOR. IT'S TIME THEY LEARNED IT...

HE NEEDS A **NEW** TACTIC:

...AS WELL AS SOMETHING ELSE:

THESE ALLEYS BELONG TO

CRIPES. WHAT A NIGHT.

WHERE'D HE GO?

...THAT THE BOOGIE MAN REALLY DOES EXIST.

HE'S GOING TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS THAT MESSAGE.

WITH VARIOUS FILES TAKEN FROM GRAVANO'S OFFICE, SPAWN HAD BEGUN TO PIECE THINGS TOGETHER. EACH NEW AGENCY DROPPING INTO THE MIX WAS TARGETED AS ANOTHER PLACE FOR AL TO CROSS-CHECK HIS DATA.

FINALLY, ALL THAT REMAINED WAS TO ACT AS COURIER.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AMAZED HOW **RELAXED** YOU ARE ABOUT DESTROYING PEOPLE.

uh?

SHUT UP.

I'VE SOMETHING TO SAY.

YOU CALL YOUR DOGS OFF THE FITZGERALD CASE. **THEN** YOU BACKTRACK OVER THAT TWISTED TRAIL OF LIES YOU'VE LAID AND SOMEHOW YOU **CORRECT** IT. I WANT TERRY FITZGERALD TO BE SO SQUEAKY CLEAN THEY'LL WANT TO GIVE HIM A **MEDAL**. IN THE FUTURE, YOU AND YOUR PEOPLE WILL **STAY AWAY** FROM HIM AND HIS FAMILY.

IN CASE I HAVEN'T MADE MY POINT, I THOUGHT I'D LEAVE YOU WITH A **COPY** OF A SPECIAL FILE.

YOU'LL FIND THAT YOUR CAREER OF WEALTH AND POWER WILL **VANISH** IF ANYONE READS IT. THE PRESIDENT AND THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF WOULD BE THE FIRST.

I KNOW WHAT MAKES YOU TICK, JASON...

WHA...? HOW'D YOU...!

...AND THAT'S POWER.

THIS FILE CAN MAKE IT DISAPPEAR IN A HEARTBEAT.

NYNN

JASON WYNN SCANS THE FILE. NO ONE ALIVE KNEW SOME OF THE ITEMS IT CONTAINS.

mmmm... SAUERKRAUT... SWISS CHEESE...

oh! oh! oh!

PICKLED HERRING!

IT'S 4:33 a.m. SAM BURKE HAS FINALLY ARRIVED IN HIS APARTMENT...

BURKE....

CRIPES!

WHAT KINDA GHOST FREAK *ARE* YOU?!!

I NEED YOU TO PASS A MESSAGE ALONG TO CHIEF BANKS. TELL HIM TO DROP THE FITZGERALD CASE...

...AND TO LEAVE MY ALLEY ALONE.

IF HE DOESN'T, I'LL MAKE SURE EVERY CRIMINAL IN A TEN BLOCK RADIUS TURNS LEFT EVERY TIME A COP GOES RIGHT.

YOU'LL BE SO BUSY CHASING THE MOB I'LL BECOME A DISTANT MEMORY.

AND DO ME A FAVOR...

...GIVE THIS FILE TO CHIEF BANKS.

KRAFT SINGLES

I'D HATE TO SEE WHAT THE MEDIA WOULD MAKE OF HIS RANGE OF 'EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.'

BANKS

SENSITIVE

IF HE'S SMART, I WON'T HAVE TO DISTRIBUTE COPIES.

CRIPES.

VITO GRAVANO SITS SWEATING IN HIS PRIVATE SAUNA. HE FINDS IT THERAPEUTIC TO OUTLINE HIS ONGOING ACTIVITIES IN SUCH HEAT.

HEY, FAT MAN.

LET'S CHAT.

DEAR GOD ABOVE.

YOU WILL CEASE AND DESIST IN YOUR IDIOTIC HOUNDING OF TERRY FITZGERALD. **NOW.** YOUR RATS HAVE GIVEN YOU BAD INFORMATION. HE'S HUMAN.

I'M NOT.

AND JUST TO MAKE YOUR DAY, HERE'S A FILE I BORROWED FROM YOUR OFFICE. I SEE IT LAYS OUT YOUR ORGANIZATION'S OBJECTIVES FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

BUSINESS 2014 APPOINTMENTS

UNLESS YOU WANT THE COPS CRAWLING UP YOUR REAR YOU'LL LEAVE FITZGERALD ALONE.

oh...

AND STAY THE HELL OUT OF MY ALLEYS.

AT THE HOME OF TERRY FITZGERALD AND HIS WIFE, WANDA BLAKE, THE EFFECTS OF SPAWN'S CRYPTIC VISITS ARE DISCUSSED IN HUSHED TONES.

IT JUST DOESN'T MAKE ANY *SENSE* TO ME.

NONE OF THIS.

I'VE GOT THE ENTIRE *CITY* CHASING ME DOWN. TRYING TO *NAIL* ME. THEN, JUST WHEN THEY'VE GOT ME... *BAM.* I'M FREE TO GO.

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR INTERROGATION, *SOMEONE* WHISPERS *SOMETHING* IN THEIR EAR, AND I BECOME A *NON-ISSUE*.

HONEY, I DON'T PRETEND TO KNOW WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT, BUT IT *SCARED* ME. ALL I COULD THINK OF WAS LOSING YOU, OF CYAN NOT HAVING A DADDY. OF YOU NOT SEEING HER *GROW UP*.

I COULDN'T BEAR THAT.

I WAS SCARED, TOO, SWEETHEART. I STILL AM.

SOMEONE MESSED WITH OUR LIVES. THEN, JUST LIKE THAT, IT'S ALL CALLED OFF. IT TAKES AN *AWFUL* LOT OF INFLUENCE TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

THAT SCARES ME.

OUTSIDE, IN THE COLD NIGHT AIR, OUR HERO PERCHES HIGH ABOVE HIS WIFE'S HOUSE.

HIS HOUSE.

OR IS IT.

HIS LIFE IS SO TWISTED NOW, HE CAN'T MAKE SENSE OF IT.

WHILE HE STARES AT THE LIGHT STREAMING FROM THE HOUSE THAT WAS ONCE HIS, AL SIMMONS REFLECTS THAT HIS EXISTENCE IS CERTAINLY HAVING AN IMPACT-- AND THAT MOST OF IT'S NEGATIVE.

HE'LL BE MORE CAREFUL IN THE FUTURE. HIS ACTIONS HAVE CAUSED HIS WIFE AND FRIEND TO SUFFER GREATLY.

SOUNDS FUNNY, HE THINKS, I HAVE A WIFE THAT'S MARRIED TO SOMEONE ELSE.

HE'LL LAUGH ABOUT THAT SOME OTHER TIME.

FOR NOW, A DISASTER HAS BEEN AVERTED.

AS THE FIRST OF THE RAIN BEGINS TO FALL, HE DOES ALLOW HIMSELF A SLIGHT SMIRK.

HIS BLUFFS HAVE WORKED.

TOP SECRET FILE

HE'LL WORRY ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE TOMORROW.

THE END.

"... I'M WITH YOU, BUDDY, ALL THE WAY!"

IN THE DANK RECESSES OF THE SPRAWLING CITY OF NEW YORK-- SPECIFICALLY, THE **BOWERY**-- THE NIGHT PEOPLE TEND TO THEIR RITUALS.

GATHERED AROUND A MAKESHIFT HEATER, THE SMALL GROUP OF DERELICTS ARE IN A RATHER FESTIVE MOOD. THEIR TERRITORY HAS BEEN UNMISTAKABLY **MARKED.**

THE TAGGING IDENTIFIES THEIR RESIDENT MESSIAH: **SPAWN.**

Y'KNOW, IT STILL GETS MY GOAT THAT BROOKLYN LOST THE DODGERS.

DIDN'T MIND THEM STINKIN' GIANTS GOIN' TO 'FRISCO, THOUGH.

BUT THE *DODGERS...* JEEZ! *THAT* BROKE MY HEART.

GIVE IT A *REST,* WILBUR. IT'S BEEN OVER 35 YEARS. THE DODGERS *AIN'T* COMING BACK.

I BET YOU'RE STILL SORE ABOUT THE RED SOX SELLING BABE RUTH TO THE YANKEES, TOO.

NOW DON'T GET ME GOIN' ON *THAT* ONE!

HEY PAUL, YOU AIN'T LEAVING US, ARE YOU?

DON'T'CHA WORRY, WILBUR, I JUST HAD ME MY *FULL,* IS ALL.

TIME TO MAKE THE OLD *BLADDER GLADDER!*

I SWEAR-- HE PEES MORE THAN A PREGNANT WOMAN.

YES, ALL IS RIGHT IN THE ALLEYS AGAIN. NO POLICE HARASSMENT. NO F.B.I. RUNNING AROUND LIKE HYPER-ACTIVE CHILDREN. NO ONE FROM THE OUTSIDE IS BOTHERING THESE OUTCASTS.

BURP!

THAT FELT GOOD.

HEY GRANDPA!

A MOMENT OF YOUR *TIME*, PLEASE!

KHKK!

*UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE DISSENTING FACTIONS ON THE **INSIDE**.*

WE'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT WHAT A ***HOTSHOT*** YOUR SPAWNIE-GUY IS. SO ME AND THE BOYS WOULD LIKE TO ***SHARE*** SOMETHING...

SNIKT

...HE'S ***NOTHIN'!***

Y'HEAR?! ***NOTHIN'!***

PAUL CATCHES SIGHT OF THE RUSTY BLADE OUT OF THE CORNER OF HIS EYE. HE WETS HIMSELF ON THE SPOT.

WE DON'T NEED HIS HELP. ***OUR*** BOSS CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF-- ***BIG TIME***.

SO YOU TELL YOUR LITTLE ***HERO*** THAT IF IT'S A ***TURF WAR*** HE'S LOOKING FOR, THEN HE'S PUSHING THE ***WRONG*** GUYS.

SWAK!

UMPF!

TELL HIM TO MOVE BACK 15 BLOCKS. AND IF HE ***DON'T...***

"... IT'S GONNA GET ***BLOODY!***"

ELSEWHERE:

IT'S ONLY HIS SECOND DAY BACK AT THE OFFICE, BUT **TERRY FITZGERALD** THINKS HE MIGHT BE RUSHING THINGS. HIS HANDS ARE STILL NOT COMPLETELY HEALED, NOR ARE HIS CRACKED RIBS. AS A MATTER OF FACT, ALMOST ANY MOVE HE MAKES HURTS, AS A RESULT OF HIS RECENT RUN-IN WITH NEARLY EVERY **POLICING ORGANIZATION** IN EXISTENCE. *

STILL, HE THOUGHT WORK MIGHT BE GOOD THERAPY WHILE HE SORTED OUT EVENTS OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS.

ONE MATTER FOR CONCERN: HE HAD BEEN THREATENED ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS BY THOSE WITHIN HIS OWN AGENCY. WOULD HIS RETURN TO THE OFFICE BE MET WITH RESISTENCE?

ADMIT IT, TERRY, THINGS ARE ***WRONG***. EVERYONE'S ACTING LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED.

NO MURDERS. NO MANHUNT. NO COPS. ***NOTHING***.

ON THE OTHER HAND, PEOPLE WON'T LOOK ME IN THE ***EYE***. SOMEBODY IS BREATHING DOWN ON THEM, HEAVY. IT'S GOING TO BE HARD TO GET ANY ANSWERS.

BUT I'VE ***GOT*** TO KNOW WHY ALL OF THIS HAPPENED. THEN I'LL--

HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'-- NEED SOME HELP?

* ISSUES 21-24 -- Tom

WANDA!

WHAT ARE YOU *DOING* HERE?

WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE A LONG TIME AGO.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

IT'S TIME I PAID ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU DO FOR A LIVING. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU *REALLY* DO. AND *WHY.*

BUT I THOUGHT...

I KNOW. I WANTED TO DISTANCE MYSELF AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO AL. I GUESS I WAS HOPING THAT MY IGNORANCE WOULD PROTECT ME FROM ANOTHER HEARTACHE. AL'S DEATH TORE ME APART, BUT YOU HELPED ME THROUGH THAT.

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH THAT *MEANT* TO ME.

SO I'D LIKE TO HELP. PLEASE. I KNOW YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A LOT. THERE ARE QUESTIONS I'VE GOT ABOUT WHAT JUST HAPPENED. I'D LIKE TO SEE IF WE CAN'T ANSWER A FEW TOGETHER.

I LOVE YOU, WANDA.

I KNOW YOU DO.

DRY, ROTTING BOARDS SHATTER AFTER A QUICK FORCEFUL KICK. THIS DENIZEN OF THE SHADOW-LANDS IS ANXIOUS TO BRAG TO HIS LEADER. TELL HIM THAT HE'S DONE HIS DUTY.

AS A GRUNT IN 'CHARLIE' COMPANY IN VIETNAM, **DAVID BREWI** THRIVED. NOW, NEARLY TWO DECADES LATER, THE SHELL-SHOCKED VET CARRIES ON THE LIFESTYLE OF A WAR LONG OVER.

THERE YOU ARE.

I PROCEEDED INTO SECTOR 12, LIKE YOU SAID. INFORMED THE ENEMY OF OUR STATUS AND REQUESTED THEIR IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL.

I ALSO MADE THREATS AND SLAPPED HIM UP A BIT.

BOSS! YOU IN HERE?

THEY SEEM VERY LOYAL TO THEIR COMMANDER. HE'S OBVIOUSLY GIVEN THEM A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY.

YOU'VE DONE WELL, DAVID.

A FEW MORE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE, AND I'LL HAVE ALL I NEED.

THEN, I'LL BE ABLE TO BRING THAT *FAT* PIG GRAVANO TO HIS *KNEES!*

I'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH! SOON... *VERY* SOON... I'M GOING TO NAIL THAT MAFIA *SCUMBAG!*

PLEASE, BOSS.

DO YOU *HEAR* ME?!

CRASH!

NOT OVERTKILL.

NOT SPAWN.

NOT GOD.

Gasp!

KRIK SKUTTLE KRIK KRIK CRATTLE

NOTHING'S GOING TO SAVE VITO!

TELL THE BOYS THAT AFTER THEY CLEAR SPAWN AND HIS GANG OFF MY TURF I WANT A *MEETING* WITH THEIR SO-CALLED HERO...

...'CAUSE HE HAS SOMETHING I *NEED!*

SPAWN.

HE'S **ACCEPTED** THE NAME. OUT OF **NECESSITY.**

HIS NEW TITLE IS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE. HE HAD TRIED TO AVOID CONTACT WITH THE 'REAL' WORLD, INSTEAD BIDING HIS TIME IN THE SHADOWS OF MANHATTAN'S BACK STREETS.

THAT DIDN'T WORK.

ALL HE WANTED WAS TO SEE HIS WIFE. TO RETURN TO HIS ONE TRUE LOVE. INSTEAD, HE'S BEEN **HUNTED**. A DEAD MAN FROM HELL DOES NOT PASS UNNOTICED.

SO, INSTEAD OF RECAPTURING HIS PAST LIFE, HE'S MERELY BEEN **AVOIDING** IT, LOOKING TO SOLVE THE UNWANTED SITUATIONS THAT HAVE FOLLOWED HIM INTO THE ALLEYS.

NOW, THAT HAS **BACKFIRED**.

HE BROUGHT UNDUE **HARM** TO HIS WIFE THROUGH HIS OWN CARELESS ACTIONS. RATHER THAN BEING **PROTECTED**, SHE WAS ALMOST **KILLED**.*

HE WON'T ALLOW THAT AGAIN.

*SEE RECENT ISSUES -- Tom.

SO HE VOWS TO REFOCUS.

TO SORT OUT THIS ABOMINABLE EXCUSE FOR A LIFE.

*YET NOW, AS A MESSIAH AMONG THE FORGOTTEN, HE'S BECOME A BEACON OF **HOPE** IN THEIR DARKEST HOURS.*

I WAS A FOOL.

AL! YOU'VE GOTTA HEAR THIS!

NO, I DON'T.

IT'S TIME YOU LEARNED TO SOLVE YOUR **OWN** PROBLEMS.

BUT, YOU DON'T UNDER-STAND!

YES I DO!!

YOU PEOPLE HAVE BECOME **LAZY!** **ALWAYS** TURNING TO ME FOR HELP. WELL, I DON'T HAVE THE **ANSWERS.**

I CAN'T SOLVE **ALL** YOUR PROBLEMS.

I'VE GOT A FEW OF MY OWN.

TELL WHOEVER IT IS I'M NOT INTERESTED.

BUT AL...

DEAR ***GOD***, AL! ***WE*** DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS! THEY WANT ***YOU***, NOT ***US***!

*ENGULFED BY THE DARKNESS, HE LEAVES BEHIND AN INNOCENT, SOON TO BE A CANDIDATE FOR THE **CROSSFIRE.***

♪ZIPPITY-♪DO-DAH!♪

munch munch munch

♪ZIPPITY-♪AAY!♪

MY, AREN'T WE IN A RATHER FESTIVE MOOD, SIR.

YOU BETCHA, TWITCH!

AND I CAN SEE WHY.

IT MUST BE THE FACT THAT OUR PRIME SUSPECT *ESCAPED* FROM US. OR MAYBE IT'S THAT OUR FELLOW OFFICERS TRIED TO STEAL OUR *CASE*.

NO! NO! IT MUST BE THAT WE HAVE *NO SOLID LEADS* IN OUR SEARCH FOR THIS *"SPAWN."*

AM I GETTING WARM, SIR?

GOD, I *LOVE* YOUR SARCASM, TWITCH.

NOPE, LI'L BUDDY. IT'S THIS *FILE.** I'VE GOT INFO ON THAT BUGGER *CHIEF BANKS* THAT'LL *CRIPPLE* HIM--

-- AND *THAT* BRINGS A *WARM SPOT* TO MY HEART.

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom·

THE AIR BEGINS TO THICKEN AS THE EARLY MORNING HOURS PASS AWAY.

HE CAME HERE TO REST. TO THINK.

IN HIS FORMER LIFE HE FOUGHT AND KILLED FOR WHAT HE BELIEVED IN. BUT THAT WAS **ANOTHER** AL SIMMONS, HE TELLS HIMSELF.

HE IS NOW SOMETHING **DIFFERENT.** SOMETHING DARK AND FOUL AND **DISGUSTING.**

AS HE STARES DOWN AT SCATTERED GROUPS OF HOMELESS PEOPLE, HE KNOWS THAT HIS MOMENTS OF FEELING HUMAN HAVE BECOME **RARE.**

SO HE **MUST** SEIZE THOSE MOMENTS

DEFEND HIS BELIEFS. ACT LIKE A MAN.

STAND AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD OPPOSE HIM.

ANSWERS TO HIS INQUIRIES COME EASILY.

IT'S A TURF WAR. PLAIN AND SIMPLE.

TIME HE MARKED HIS TERRITORY.

YOU WANTED TO TALK?

NOT EXACTLY!

KSH!

unh?

PLY-WOOD ?!

KRUNCH

SHOW YOUR-SELF... COWARD!

HERE I AM, DEMON.

YOU WON'T HAVE TO PUSH THE OLD GUYS AROUND ANYMORE.

IDIOT. I DON'T CARE ABOUT *YOUR* PEOPLE *OR* MINE! IT'S *YOU* I WANT!

TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT VITO G. AND WHY HE'S *AFTER* YOU SO BAD.

THAT MAN DOESN'T GET PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN SOMEONE UNLESS THEY KNOW THINGS THEY *SHOULDN'T.*

WHAT THE **HELL** DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH THE **ALLEYS?!**

YOU WANT A FIGHT...

SMAT!

...THEN FIGHT!

JUST LEAVE MY PEOPLE ALONE!

GKUKK

PROTECTING THEIR MASTER, CHAINS SNAP AND ENSNARE THE BEAST.

*NOW SPAWN USES HIS **MILITARY** SKILLS TO GAIN ADVANTAGE.*

*THERE SHOULD BE NO NEED TO DEPLETE HIS **POWERS.***

DO YOU HEAR ME?

STAY AWAY.

NEXT TIME, YOUR HEAD COMES WITH ME.

HOW DARE YOU?!

SPAWN ASSUMED THE BEAST WOULDN'T BACK DOWN.

HE'D PLANTED HIMSELF IN FRONT OF A WEAKENED PART OF THE FLOORING, CONCEALING THE CRACKS WITH HIS CAPE.

A DEFT MOVE, AND THE CREATURE IS SWALLOWED BY THE COLLAPSING PLANKS.

NO!

SMASH

A BIO-MECHANICAL APPENDAGE, EXTENDED TWO-FOLD, RETRACTS IN A BLINK.

KLAK!

THE SCENE GOES QUIET BUT FOR SCURRYING RATS AND THE FLAPPING OF CRIMSON CLOTH. IT SEEMS THIS DISPUTE HAS BEEN SETTLED.

YOU LISTEN GOOD! I'M GOING TO NAIL THAT PIG *VITO*-- AND *YOU'RE* GOING TO *HELP!*

?

IS THAT WHAT THIS IS ABOUT-- SOME PERSONAL VENDETTA?

I DON'T CARE! YOU WANT GRAVANO, FINE.

BUT WHAT'S WITH THIS TURF WAR CRAP?

A DIVERSION.

"IT WASN'T LONG AGO THAT VITO FORCED ME TO BE HIS GUINEA PIG. HE WANTED THE PERFECT HITMAN.

"I WAS STUPID ENOUGH TO BE EMPLOYED BY HIM AT THE TIME.

"THREATS TO MY FAMILY WERE NOT MADE CASUALLY.

"TO PROTECT THEM, I AGREED TO THEIR HIGH-TECH *BUTCHERY*. THEY WANTED TO FUSE FLESH AND *METAL*.

"BUT SOMEONE SCREWED UP.

"THE COMBINATION OF CHEMICALS, MICROSURGERY, WHO KNOWS *WHAT* SORT OF RADIATION AND ANTI-REJECTION DRUGS *TRANSFORMED* ME.

"A FEW DAYS LATER, I ESCAPED MY IMPRISONMENT."

VITO AND HIS CARTEL ARE *INTRIGUED* BY YOU, SPAWN. THAT KIND OF INTEREST CAN GET YOU *KILLED*.

YOU CALLED ME A DEMON. I COULD ONLY *WISH*.

I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY...

NO. YOU CAN'T.

HE *KILLED* THEM. SLAUGHTERED MY WHOLE *FAMILY.*

JUST TO PROTECT HIS ASS.

OUR CLOAKED HERO HEARS THE REST OF THE GRISLY DETAILS.

PAIN AND ANGUISH.

IT'S SOMETHING HE'S QUITE FAMILIAR WITH.

I CAN HELP YOU. JUST GIVE ME AN HOUR.

WHY SHOULD I?

"BECAUSE, LIKE ME, YOU DON'T HAVE A CHOICE."

SHORTLY...

I BELIEVE YOU'LL FIND THIS USEFUL.

UH? HOW'D YOU SNEAK UP WITHOUT MAKING A SOUND?

IT DOESN'T MATTER.

BUT THIS MIGHT.

IT CONTAINS EVERYTHING I HAVE ON VITO. I HAVEN'T READ IT ALL BUT THERE'S **PLENTY** IN HERE TO BUST HIS BALLS.

WHERE'D IT COME FROM?

HIS ACCOUNTANT.* VITO HAD HIM ELIMINATED. YOU'D BE DOING **BOTH** OF US A FAVOR IF YOU SWATTED HIM **HARD**.

* ISSUE 22 -- Tom.

FOR ALL HIS POWER, THIS CREATURE SEEMED AS TORTURED AS SPAWN HIMSELF... AND SEEMS AS WILLING TO GO TO ANY LENGTHS TO ACHIEVE HIS GOALS.

THANKS, SPAWN. I'LL GIVE YOU A LOWDOWN WHEN I'M ***THROUGH*** WITH HIM.

I'LL BE AROUND.

SPAWN PAUSES TO THINK.

*IS THIS CRAZED BEING FRIEND OR FOE... OR SOMETHING **IN BETWEEN...?***

THE END.

EVIL.

IT'S NOT A GOAL THAT PEOPLE CONSCIOUSLY SET FOR THEMSELVES, YET MILLIONS... **BILLIONS**... HAVE BEEN EMBRACED BY ITS SEDUCTIVE COILS.

IT CAN HIDE BEHIND A VARIETY OF GUISES:

POWER. DESIRE. COMPETITION. JUSTIFICATION. SELF-INTEREST.

IF THE THOUGHT OF AN HONEST WAGE TO COVER HONEST EXPENSES SEEMS LIKE A SIGN OF STUNTED GROWTH... IF IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE THE PROFIT COMES FROM, OR WHERE IT GOES... **WATCH OUT!**

TRADE AND BARTER ARE **REAL**: CASH CAN BE USED FOR ANY THING OR ACTIVITY: IT'S AN **ABSTRACT**. MONEY COMES FROM NOWHERE AND PROMISES EVERYTHING.

IF YOUR MOTIVES AREN'T CLEAN, MONEY ITSELF BECOMES EVIL.

TYPICALLY, WE DISTILL EFFORT INTO VALUE IN TWO-WEEK BATCHES.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO IT. WE **NEED** IT. WE CALL IT PAYDAY.

A LACK OF THIS EVIL CAN **COST** US. **DEARLY.**

WHAT?!

THEY CAN'T **DO** THAT, **NO WAY!** YOU **STOP** THEM! YOU **GET MY LITTLE GIRL BACK!**

THOUGH MOST PROFESS THEIR INNOCENCE, EACH OF US HAS FACED IT IN OUR LIVES... EACH OF US HAS TOUCHED IT, HOWEVER BRIEFLY. THE BIBLE CALLS IT SIN, AND HAS IDENTIFIED ITS ROOT:

THE LOVE OF MONEY.

BUT--WHEN WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY, ENOUGH EVIL, THE WORLD TELLS US WE'RE LOSERS. SO, WHAT DETERMINES OUR PLACE IN SOCIETY IS NOT HOW MUCH KINDNESS IS IN OUR HEARTS BUT HOW MUCH EVIL IS IN OUR WALLETS.

I'M SORRY, MR. BARNETT, BUT THE JUDGE'S DECISION HAS ALREADY BEEN HANDED DOWN.

I DID EVERY-THING I COULD. UNFORTUNATELY, THE LAW ALLOWS US NO FURTHER APPEALS.

DON'T HAND ME THAT **BULL!** YOU'RE A LAWYER, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO **HELP** ME!

WHAT AM I PAYING YOU FOR?!

ACTUALLY YOU'RE NOT, MR. BARNETT. I'M A PUBLIC DEFENDER. MY BILL ISN'T YOUR RESPONSI-BILITY.

AS FOR YOUR DAUGHTER, I KNOW THERE'S NOTHING I CAN SAY THAT WILL MAKE THIS ANY EASIER, **BUT** THE JUDGE FEELS SHE'LL BE BETTER OFF WITH FOSTER PARENTS AS PROVIDERS.

I'M NOT SAYING IT'S FAIR...

FAIR? **FAIR!!**

YOU ASK ***KATIE*** ABOUT FAIR! SHE WANTS TO STAY WITH ME. SHE WON'T GO!

SWEET JESUS.

WHAT KIND OF COUNTRY SENDS A CHILD FROM HER DAD.

SHE DOESN'T HAVE A CHOICE. NONE OF US DO. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW AT TEN.

CLICK

NEW YORK STATE COURTHOUSE, STATEN ISLAND: THE NEXT DAY.

WOULD YOU CARE TO SAY ANYTHING BEFORE I GIVE MY RULING, MR. BARNETT?

PLEASE, YOUR HONOR, KATIE'S ALL I GOT. YOU ***CAN'T*** TAKE HER AWAY FROM ME. SHE'S ONLY FOURTEEN BUT SHE KNOWS SO MUCH, THIS WHOLE THING IS TEARING HER TO PIECES.

SHE DESERVES BETTER THAN ALL THIS.

I WOULD AGREE, MR. BURNETT.

I HAVE CONSIDERED THE FACT THAT KATE VALUES YOU AS HER FATHER, AND HER STATED WISH TO REMAIN A PART OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD.

THIS DECISION HAS BEEN ONE OF THE TOUGHEST OF MY CAREER.

THAT IS WHY, AFTER A VERY LONG AND DIFFICULT DELIBERATION, I'VE DECIDED TO ***REMOVE*** HER FROM YOUR CARE AND PUT HER IN A NEW SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES. THIS, I BELIEVE, IS FOR HER OWN GOOD.

SINCE THE DEATH OF YOUR WIFE FIFTEEN MONTHS AGO, THE STATE HAS BEEN REVIEWING YOUR FILES. AT THE TIME OF KATE'S ADOPTION IN 1982, YOU AND YOUR WIFE WERE ABLE TO PROVIDE A STABLE, SAFE ENVIRONMENT.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE UNTIMELY LOSS OF YOUR WIFE HAS REMOVED THE MOTHER FIGURE FROM THE CHILD'S LIFE. ADD TO THAT YOUR STEADY LACK OF EMPLOYMENT FOR OVER ELEVEN MONTHS AND YOUR CURRENT LIVING CONDITIONS. I FEEL I HAVE *NO CHOICE* BUT TO PLACE HER WITH FOSTER PARENTS WHO MIGHT BETTER PROVIDE FOR HER FUTURE.

IF IN THE COMING YEARS YOU CAN SHOW THIS COURT A LIVING SITUATION CONDUSIVE TO A YOUNG TEENAGER'S NEEDS, AN AUXILIARY APPEAL MAY BE FILED.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

*HE UNDERSTANDS, ALL RIGHT. TWELVE YEARS OF LOVE, CARING AND TENDERNESS MEAN **NOTHING** IF YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO PAY FOR A COLLEGE EDUCATION.*

*FRED BARNETT DOESN'T **HAVE** ENOUGH MONEY. ENOUGH **EVIL**.*

SOMEWHERE IN TIME:

THE DANCING FLAMES IN HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL ARE LACED WITH THE SCENT OF BILE AND OTHER ORGANIC MATTER. OVERSEEING THE UNIMAGINABLE AREA, ITS SELF-IMPOSED RULER DOMINATES ALL. HE IS THE **MALEBOLGIA**, A DEVIL, ONE OF MANY WHO OCCUPY THE MYRIAD LAYERS WHICH COMPRISE THIS PLACE.

HIS ULTIMATE GOAL: THE BUILDING OF ARMIES, CONSISTING OF LOST SOULS FROM THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS. THEY WILL EVENTUALLY CARRY HIS STANDARD AGAINST HEAVEN, AT **ARMAGEDDON.**

AT THE FORE WILL BE HIS OFFICERS. THESE MOST EXCELLENT OF THE DAMNED, SINGLED OUT FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS IN COMBAT, WILL DRILL THEIR NIGHTMARISH TACTICS INTO THE TROOPS AT THEIR DISPOSAL.

THESE ARE HIS ELITE. THESE ARE HIS **HELL-SPAWN.**

EACH HAS A SPECIFIC DESTINY TO FULFILL, THOUGH NONE REALIZED IT AT THE TIME OF THEIR "RECRUITMENT."

IT IS ONE SUCH SPAWN WHO IS NOW UNDER THE MALEBOLGIA'S WATCHFUL EYE: THE OFFICER-IN-TRAINING WHO'S NATIVE TO THE EARTH... THE ONE FORMERLY CALLED **LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS.**

"COME, MY PETS, LET ME AMUSE YOU WITH ANOTHER TALE," HISSES THE MALEBOLGIA. HE LEANS FORWARD, CHIN RESTING COYLY ON HIS HAND. HE CONTINUES, "THOUGH THEY ALL RESIST, THE HELL-SPAWN HAVE ***ALWAYS*** BECOME GREAT LEADERS FOR MY ARMY... THOSE THAT SURVIVE THE TRAINING. THERE HAVE BEEN A ***FEW*** DISAPPOINTMENTS. IT IS THEIR INTERNAL STRUGGLES BACK ON THEIR HOME PLANETS WHICH INTRIGUE ME... THE ***HUNT,*** IF YOU WILL."

AS HIS CRYPTIC DISSERTATION UNFOLDS, THE INHABITANTS, BOTH RESIDENT AND DAMNED, SHIFT CLOSER. THE MALEBOLGIA LEANS BACK AND SMILES.

"LET ME UPDATE YOU ON OUR NEWEST SELECTION... OUR NEWEST ***SPAWN.***"

GOD.

EVERYTHING'S SO MESSED UP.

I'M NOT THINKING STRAIGHT ANYMORE. NOT USING MY TRAINING LIKE I SHOULD.

THIS WHOLE THING IS ABOUT ME AND WANDA.

I'VE BEEN SO DAMN DISTRACTED BY ALL THIS UNBELIEVABLE CRAP!

THE MAFIA.

HITMEN.

COPS.

EVEN THE BOYS IN THE ALLEYS.

BUT AT LEAST I'VE STOPPED HIDING LIKE SOME COWERING DOG.

NOW THEY KNOW I EXIST... AND WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF.

BALL'S IN THEIR COURT.

LET'S SEE IF THEY CAN COME UP WITH SOME BETTER ANSWERS ABOUT WHAT I'VE BECOME.

ALL I KNOW IS THAT SINCE I GOT THESE POWERS, I'VE BECOME SOME FRIGGIN' MAGNET FOR EVERY-BODY'S ANGER.

PLUS, I SEEM TO BE USING THE CONFLICTS AS A WAY OF AVOIDING HAVING TO FACE WANDA AGAIN.*

LIKE I'M STALLING.

YOU'RE *NOT.* YOU'RE ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE-- THOUGH YOU AREN'T *AWARE* OF THAT.

WHO--?!

* NOT SINCE ISSUE THREE -- Tom.

SURELY, IT HASN'T BEEN SO LONG THAT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN YOUR FRIEND THE *COUNT?** YOUR LIFE *HAS* BECOME SOMEWHAT COMPLICATED.

WOULDN'T YOU AGREE?

HOW DO YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT ME? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU ANYWAY?

I'M NOT YOUR CONCERN. YOU TORTURE YOURSELF FOR ANSWERS THAT, MOSTLY, YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN.

*SEE ISSUE 9 -- Tom.

YOU'RE JUST NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH.

MUCH AS I'M TEMPTED TO WRITE YOU OFF, YOU *DO* SHOW SOME SPARK.

SO, LET'S GO OVER WHAT YOU *DO* KNOW--AND STOP ME IF ANY OF THIS IS NEW TO YOU.

YOU'RE AL SIMMONS. YOU DIED, MADE A PACT WITH A DEVIL, NOT *THE* DEVIL, AND RETURNED TO EARTH. YOU HAVE POWER BEYOND BELIEF, A COSTUME MELDED WITH YOUR SKIN... AND A BODY MADE OF 400 POUNDS OF NECROPLASM.

YOU'VE FOUGHT DEMONS, DEVILS, ANGELS, CYBORGS--THE PROVERBIAL NINE YARDS. BUT NONE OF THAT BOTHERS YOU BECAUSE YOU JUST WANT YOUR *NORMAL* LIFE BACK.

WOULDN'T WE ALL.

BUT WHY ME?

WHY?

BECAUSE THE DEVIL CHOOSES ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE A GREAT CAPACITY FOR EVIL. IT COMES FROM WITHIN--SOMETHING YOU'RE *BORN* WITH. THOUGH YOU DENY YOUR EVIL SIDE, THE DEVIL THINKS YOUR INNER DARKNESS CAN BE HARNESSED FOR HIS CAUSE.

WHICH IS?

ARMAGEDDON.

THE FINAL CLASH BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL. YOUR SIDE MUST BE THOROUGHLY PREPARED FOR THE WAR. FOR COUNTLESS YEARS THE MALEBOLGIA HAS BEEN GATHERING SOULS FOR HIS ARMY. ONE DAY, THE COMMAND WILL BE GIVEN AND THE FORCES OF DARKNESS WILL BEGIN THEIR ASSAULT ON THE GATES OF HEAVEN.

THOSE, AL, WILL BE THE *TRUE* DAYS OF JUDGMENT.

THE MONOLOGUE CONTINUES.

"THOUGH MY HELL-SPAWN ARE PERMANENTLY ENSNARED, THEY CONTINUE TO TEST THE BOUNDRIES OF THEIR CAGE," *HISSES THE BLOATED TYRANT.* "THEY WILL SCURRY AROUND, AT FIRST HOPING, ***DREAMING*** THAT THERE IS A WAY OUT... BUT THERE ***IS*** NONE. THEY HAVE ***TWO CHOICES*** ONLY: ACQUIRE THE TROOPS AND INSPIRE THE LOYALTY AFFORDED A FIRST-RATE OFFICER; OR ***PERISH...*** AND THEN ANSWER ETERNALLY FOR FRUSTRATING ME IN THE PURSUIT OF MY GOALS.

"LET'S SEE HOW OUR DEAR ***AL SIMMONS*** DEALS WITH HIS SITUATION."

LEANING BACKWARDS, THE MALEBOLGIA PUSHES HIS FEET FURTHER INTO THE SEARING FLAMES. NEARER CLIMB THE LESSER SPAWN, ANXIOUS TO LEARN WHY IT WAS SIMMONS PICKED FROM AMONG THE MULTITUDE OF DESERVING DAMNED.

"AH. I SEE THAT YOU ***TOO*** ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS," *CACKLES THE MALEBOLGIA.* "HOW IRONIC THAT AS SIMMONS TORTURES HIMSELF, CASTING ABOUT FOR ANSWERS, ***YOU***, HIS FUTURE ***TROOPS***, ARE CURIOUS ABOUT THOSE SAME QUESTIONS.

"WHY ***HIM***? WHY ***AL SIMMONS***?

A SMILE CROSSES HIS CRACKED LIPS. THE STORY-TELLER RELISHES THE ADORATION OF THE RAPT, IF CAPTIVE, AUDIENCE.

"LET ME TELL YOU WHAT MAKES A ***TRUE*** HELL-SPAWN."

SO I'M JUST A PUPPET. THAT'S ENCOURAGING.

THINGS WERE SO **SIMPLE** WHEN I WAS ALIVE. I FOLLOWED ORDERS. KILLED WHO THE GOVERNMENT **TOLD** ME, AND COLLECTED A STEADY PAYCHECK.

BUT NOW THIS! I DON'T HAVE A HOME OR A WIFE TO GO BACK TO, AND **ALL** I SEEM TO DO IS FIGHT SOMEONE **ELSE'S** BATTLES.

NO ONE SAID BEING DEAD WAS GOING TO BE EASY, AL.

AIN'T **THAT** THE TRUTH. TELL ME SOMETHING, COUNT, WHY PUT ME IN THE FUTURE. **FIVE YEARS.** WHAT'S THE **POINT?**

A TEST. ONE OF MANY YOU MUST PASS TO FULFILL YOUR ***DESTINY.*** THE DEVILS, BY NATURE, ARE TRICKSTERS. THEY ***THRIVE*** ON BENDING THE RULES OF EVERY GAME THEY PLAY.

YOU WANTED BACK TO EARTH. HE ***GAVE*** YOU THAT. UNFORTUNATELY, HAVING NEVER BEEN DEAD BEFORE, YOU WEREN'T AWARE OF YOUR ***RIGHTS.*** SINCE YOU DIDN'T SPECIFY ANY CONDITIONS WITH YOUR REQUEST, THE MALEBOLGIA GRANTED YOU THE TIME TO SEE YOUR WIFE. ***THAT'S ALL.***

HE GAVE YOU ***ONE*** THING. EVERYTHING ELSE WAS HIS TO DETERMINE. A PRETTY SOUR TRADE, I'D SAY.

BUT DON'T FEEL BAD. THERE'VE BEEN PLENTY OF OTHERS.

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE THAT SUFFERS.

HEY AL! *AL!* GOT A MINUTE? I NEED YOU TA MEET A FRIEND.

I TOLD HIM YOU COULD HELP. Y'KNOW, DO SOME OF YOUR *MAGIC*.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I KNOW WE'VE NEVER MET FORMALLY, BUT I LIVE AROUND HERE TOO... SEEN ALL THE CRAZY STUFF THAT'S BEEN HAPPENING. WELL *ANY*WAYS, THIS HERE IS ***FRED BARNETT,*** AN OLD PAL FROM 'WAY BACK. HE'S GOT A BIT OF A PROBLEM. DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

SO I TOLD HIM YOU COULD POSSIBLY HELP. GIVE HIM THE SCOOP, FREDDY.

'EVENING, SIR.

YESTERDAY THE COURTS TOOK MY ***DAUGHTER*** AWAY FROM ME. AFTER ***TWELVE YEARS*** THEY JUST ***TOOK*** MY BABY FROM ME. THEY SAY I'M NOT ***FIT*** TO BE A PARENT ANY LONGER.

AND IT'S ALL BECAUSE OF ***MONEY.***

THE JUDGE SAYS I'VE GOT TO ***PROVIDE*** BETTER. ***GIVE*** HER MORE THINGS. ***THEN*** I CAN HAVE MY LITTLE KATIE ***BACK.***

PLEASE, SIR. I DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO. NO ONE WANTS TO HELP. THEY SAY THEIR HANDS ARE ALL TIED.

ERIK, HERE, SAID YOU'VE BEEN HELPING FOLKS OUT SINCE YOU ARRIVED. HE SAYS YOU PROTECT THE POOR. WELL, I'M TELLING YOU I LOST MY LITTLE GIRL BECAUSE I'M POOR.

ARE YOU GUYS NUTS?!

I'M NOT SOME WALKING BANK MACHINE! IF I COULD MAKE MONEY, I SURE WOULDN'T BE LIVING IN THE ALLEYS! GRAB A CLUE, GUYS!!

I'M HERE TO STOP ANYONE FROM HASSLING THOSE ON MY TURF-- ESPECIALLY ANYONE WHO'S AFTER ME. I PROTECT THE FOLKS WITHIN MY AREA-- NOT THOSE FROM OUTSIDE.

BITE ME!!

NOW GO! AND DON'T YOU EVER DO THIS AGAIN, ERIK.

SORRY, FRED. I THOUGHT HE WAS SOMEONE WHO GAVE A DAMN.

WHAT WILL I DO NOW?

YOU SHOULDN'T BE SO HARSH. THEY SEE YOU AS A SAVIOR. EVERY-ONE ELSE THINKS YOU'RE EVIL.

THEY'RE GETTING TOO COCKY. SOME OF THE GUYS THINK I'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING. "GOOD OL' AL-- HE'LL FIX IT!"

OBVIOUSLY, I'M GIVING THEM A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY.

NO. YOU'VE GIVEN THEM HOPE. IT'S SOMETHING MOST OF THEM HAD LOST.

"***POWER!***" - SCREECHES THE *MALEBOLGIA*, "IT BOTH MOTIVATES AND ENABLES THE TRULY CHOSEN. THE SPAWN IS BEING HUNTED BY EVERY AGENCY IMAGINABLE, AND THE ONLY THING THAT CAN *SAVE* HIM IS HIS INFERNALLY-INSPIRED ***POWER!***

"I TRANSFORM THE RECRUITS INTO CREATURES OF MAGIC. EVENTUALLY THEY LEARN THAT THEIR INNER POOL OF ENERGY WILL ONE DAY BE DRAINED. IT IS ***THEN*** THAT THE TRAINING BEGINS IN EARNEST.

"THEIR ***REBIRTH*** PLACES THEM AT A FOUR-WAY ***CROSSROAD***.

"THEY CAN DO ***NOTHING***... LOCK THEMSELVES AWAY FROM THEIR SURROUNDINGS... WHICH TURNS THEIR HEARTS COLD. IN TIME, VERY GRADUALLY, THEIR ENERGIES ARE SPENT ANYWAY.

"THEY CAN CONVINCE THEMSELVES THEY'RE ***HEROIC***, WHILE UNWITTINGLY ACTING ON THE IMPULSES WHICH DAMNED THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY WILL SINGLE OUT AND PUNISH THE EVIL ONES AROUND THEM... EVIL SOULS WHICH THEN ARE ***MINE***.

"THEY MAY CHOOSE THE PATH OF ***DARKNESS***, AGGRESSIVELY DISPATCHING THOSE MOST VENAL AND VICIOUS, WHO'VE ***EARNED*** THEIR PLACE HERE.

"OR THEY MAY ***DESPAIR***, AND PERISH THROUGH CARELESSNESS OR DESIGN.

"IN ANY CASE, THE SPAWN WILL RETURN TO ME, EITHER AS VALUED ***OFFICERS***... OR AS A SOURCE OF ***NOURISHMENT*** FOR MY HUNGRY ARMIES!"

THE SUB-OVERLORD CASTS A SPASTIC ARM FORWARD. IT'S A GESTURE OF **TRIUMPH**.

WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME?

JUST BEWARE. THERE ARE AN INFINITE NUMBER OF FORCES IN OUR REALITY AND EACH HAS AN AGENDA IT WISHES TO FULFILL.

MEANING, I'D BETTER GET USED TO ALL THIS CRAP 'CAUSE IT'S HERE TO STAY?

NOT EXACTLY.

WATCH VERY CAREFULLY. LOOK, LISTEN AND LEARN. THINGS MAY NOT ALWAYS BE AS THEY SEEM.

SUDDENLY HE'S **GONE**, VANISHED IN A GLOWING, PRISMATIC PLUME. FROM THE COLOR OF ITS SPARKLES, **COUNT NICHOLAS COGLIOSTRO** KNOWS IT'S BEEN SENT FROM ABOVE.

THE LAYERS OF **HEAVEN** ARE JUST AS MULTITUDINOUS AS THOSE OF **HELL**, AFTER ALL.

YOU'RE A ***MARKED MAN***, AL. ANYTHING MAY HAPPEN AT ANY TIME. IN FACT, YOUR NEXT 'ENCOUNTER' IS JUST A FEW SECONDS AWAY.

WHAT'RE YOU JABBERING ABOUT?

LEARN, MY FRIEND.

MR. SIMMONS, MIGHT WE TALK?

WHA...?! JESUS, LADY!

CALL ME GABRIELLE, MR. SIMMONS. IF I MIGHT HAVE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME, I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU.

I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TALK.

Oh, YES YOU DO THOUGH IT MAY NOT APPEAR THAT WAY.

Huh?

NOTHING CAN HARM US IN HERE, AND WE'RE NOW OUTSIDE OF TIME AS IT'S USUALLY PERCEIVED.

WINE? THEY HAVE A FINE CHILLED CHABLIS I CAN PERSONALLY RECOMMEND.

THIS. MY LIFE. EVERYTHING'S SO SCREWED UP.

NONSENSE. BUT SIT DOWN, SIT DOWN, YOU'RE MAKING ME NERVOUS.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

IT'S A DIMENSIONAL UMBRELLA. YOU'RE STILL IN NEW YORK, BUT WE'RE ALSO SITTING IN THE GROUNDS OF A SMALL INN IN THE *LOIRE* VALLEY.

SOMETHING TO EAT? THE CREPES SUZETTES HERE ARE QUITE OUT OF THIS WORLD.

THIS IS GOOD. FIRST WINE I'VE HAD SINCE I DIED...

I'M NOT HUNGRY. WHY HAVE YOU KIDNAPPED ME?

I'VE ORDERED SOME STRAWBERRIES FOR MYSELF. EVEN ANGELS WATCH THEIR WAIST-LINES...

I WOULDN'T GO SO FAR AS TO CALL IT A KIDNAPPING, MR. SIMMONS. MORE OF AN INTERMISSION.

DO YOU REMEMBER HER?

HER? SURE. SHE CAME AT ME OUT OF NOWHERE, MONTHS AGO, AND TRIED TO KILL ME...

THAT'S OUR GIRL. ALL THE SUBTLETY OF A SHERMAN TANK. HER NAME'S ***ANGELA***. SHE HUNTS THINGS. PARTICULARLY THINGS LIKE YOU.

WHY?

WHY NOT? SHE'S AN ANGEL. YOU'RE A CREATURE OF HELL. SHE PROBABLY WANTED TO HANG YOUR HEAD ON HER TROPHY ROOM WALL.

AND YOU'RE AN ANGEL TOO?

YOU AND I ARE ON OPPOSITE SIDES, MR. SIMMONS. THIS MEETING IS SIMPLY TO ALLOW US TO EXCHANGE SOME INFORMATION.

YOU SEE THE LANCE THAT ANGELA'S HOLDING IN THAT PICTURE?

SURE.

SHE ATTACKED ME WITH IT-- LATER I TOUCHED ONE OF THE BUTTONS ON THE SIDE. BLEW ME INTO THE DARNDEST SORTA DREAM I'VE EVER HAD.

IT DID NOTHING OF THE SORT.

MERCI BEAUCOUP, PIERRE. STRAWBERRY, MR. SIMMONS? NO?

IT MERELY REDEFINED YOU BRIEFLY IN TERMS OF LEVELS OF REALITY. QUITE HOW YOU GOT BACK IS A PUZZLE TO ALL OF US. YOU MUST HAVE SOME VERY POWERFUL FRIENDS.

SO ANGELA DEFINITELY LEFT THE LANCE BEHIND HER WHEN SHE FLED?

YES.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE IT IS NOW?

Uh... NO. IT WASN'T IN THE ALLEY WHEN I GOT BACK.

PITY. WELL, THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP, MR. SIMMONS. YOU'VE BEEN VERY HELPFUL.

I CAN'T SEE THAT BITCH ANGELA WRIGGLING HER WAY OUT OF THIS ONE.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE CHECK. IT'S ALL TAKEN CARE OF. YOU'VE BEEN VERY HELPFUL.

AND MR. SIMMONS? WAR IS COMING. SOONER OR LATER YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO CHOOSE SIDES.

HELL ON EARTH AND HEAVEN ON EARTH ARE GOING TO BE EQUALLY AS INHOSPITABLE TO THE PEOPLE WHO CURRENTLY INHABIT EARTH ON EARTH, IF YOU FOLLOW ME.

AND YOU DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE...

DO YOU?

JE-ZUS!

WHAT THE HELL!?

HEAVEN, ACTUALLY.

THOUGH NOT THE ONE YOU OR I WERE TAUGHT ABOUT.

THEY KEEP SMALL PIECES OF IT IN DIFFERENT TIME CONTINUUMS.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS?!

ARE YOU SOME KINDA GOD?

HEE HEE. NOT VERY LIKELY.

BURP

I'M JUST A MAN, MUCH LIKE YOURSELF. BEEN THROUGH A FEW WARS, TOO. THOUGHT I WAS A BIG SHOT, COULD BEAT ANYONE.

I WAS ***WRONG***.

THEY WON. NOT COMPLETELY, BUT ENOUGH TO NEUTRALIZE MY EFFORTS. NOW, I'M NOT ALONE IN LOOKING TO HE WHO MAY BE THE ONE TO STAND UP TO THESE MANY FACTIONS AND ***WIN***.

AND ***BELIEVE*** ME, AL, THIS DEFINITELY IS ABOUT ***WINNING***.

WHAT ABOUT THESE **ANGELS** THAT SEEM TO KEEP POPPING UP?*

*MORE TO COME IN THE ANGELA MINI-SERIES --Tom.

THEY HAVE A NEED FOR YOU, ***TOO*** -- BUT I CAN'T PUT MY FINGER ON WHAT IT MAY ***BE***.

WELL -- WHEN YOU DO, CALL ME. I NEED A **BREAK** FROM ALL THIS. SEE YA AROUND.

"YES! YES!!

"EVEN *HEAVEN* IS OUT TO GET OUR SIMMONS-SPAWN! NOW HE IS *COMPLETELY* DISORIENTED, GROPING FOR ANSWERS. GOOD. BAD. UP. DOWN. HE DOESN'T KNOW **WHICH** WAY TO TURN! *HA HA HA!!*

LIKE A BAD COMEDIAN, THE MALEBOLGIA LAUGHS AT HIS OWN RHETORIC. TENSING UNEXPECTEDLY, HE SQUISHES THE UNLUCKY LISTENER PERCHED IN HIS CALLOUSED HAND.

"SOON, VERY SOON, HE ***WILL*** FIND HIS ANSWER. WHEN HE ***DOES***, IT WILL ***CONSUME*** HIM, AS IT HAS THE OTHERS BEFORE HIM.

Power!

"IT'S YOUR CALLING... IT'S IN YOUR ***BLOOD!***

"HOW I ***DO*** ENJOY THIS GAME!"

7:1:7:4

*THE GAME WILL HAVE AN END... BUT ITS LENGTH WILL DEPEND UPON THE CREATIVITY OF ITS **PLAYERS**.*

TWO NIGHTS LATER...

THAT *RIPPLE* A BIT *POWERFUL* FOR YOU, AL?

AW, TAKE IT EASY, COUNT!

I'M FINALLY OUT OF MY MOOD SWING AND NOW YOU WANT TO RAIN ON MY PARADE.

THIS END UP

FOR THE MOMENT, I FEEL ALIVE! --ALMOST.

HEY **FELLAS**, DID I TELL YOU THAT YOUR GREAT AND POWERFUL LEADER GOT **SUCKERED** BY SOME FAT LITTLE SLICE-AND-DICE **CLOWN**, A FEW WEEKS BACK?

YEP! I GAVE THE RUNT A PORTION OF MY **ENERGY** SO'S HE COULD SHICK RIP HIS BROTHERS APART. UN-**FORTUNATELY**, IT LEFT ME EATING **DUST** FOR A DAY. *

THEN, THE LITTLE GUY CAME **BACK** TO GIVE ME WHAT HE'D **TAKEN**! CAN YOU IMAGINE... **BURP!** *SCUSE ME... ...A DEMON KEEPING HIS WORD BY RETURNING?

HA HA HA

...BUT **NOT** BEFORE HE LAID A GOOD **SHELLACKING** TO MY **HEAD**... SHICK HA HAHEE AM I AWESOME, OR WHAT?!

*VIOLATOR #3 -- Tom.

HEY, C'MON GUYS. NO ONE'S LAUGHING. WHAT'S THE **PROBLEM?**

YOU COULD'VE HELPED HIM. DONE ***SOME***THING.

I'M **NOT** GOING TO HELP NO BLUE-FACED PIECE OF...

NOT HIM!

I'M TALKING ABOUT MY FRIEND ***FRED.***

WHO THE HELL IS FRED?

YOU **DON'T** REMEMBER?

HERE! MAYBE THIS'LL REFRESH YOUR MEMORY!

THWAP

MAN COMMITS SUICIDE OVER CUSTODY RUL

SUICIDE NOTE RECOVER

New York– Police have identified the body of ed Barnett, 51, daughter has custody

STUNNED BY THE NEWS, SPAWN SHRINKS AWAY FROM THE GLARE OF ACCUSING EYES...

MY GOD.

HOW D'YOU FEEL NOW... ***HERO.***

FORGET IT. NEVER ***MIND.*** HE WAS FROM THE ***OUTSIDE.*** HE DIDN'T ***COUNT.***

THAT'S IT. RUN ***AWAY,*** YOU ***LOSER.***

HA-HA HA HA

hee hee HO ho HAA

SOMEWHERE IN TIME.

HA HA HA HA HA

hee hee heee

TENS OF MILLIONS OF TWISTED SOULS HOWL WITH LAUGHTER.

Haw heh heh

HA HA HA

HAW HAW HO HO HO

hee hee

LOUDEST AMONG THEM IS THEIR STORYTELLER. IT WILL BE SOME CONSIDERABLE TIME BEFORE THE MANIACAL SOUNDS DIE DOWN.

LOST IN THE MOST OBSCURE SHADOWS OF A DECAYING CITY WALKS A DEAD MAN.

TONIGHT, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HIS RETURN, HE FEELS DEAD.

NEXT ISSUE: THE CURSE

MASSACHUSETTS.

ONCE AGAIN, I'VE BEEN PASSED OVER.

I UNDER-STAND.

YOU HAVE GIVEN POWER TO ONE WHOSE FAITH MUST BE FAR GREATER THAN MINE.

NOW I MUST PROVE MYSELF...

SO I ACCEPT YOUR TEST OF MY FAITH.

THIS "SPAWN" AND I SHALL MEET.

THEN YOU WILL SEE.

SPAWNING

SPAWN ON RAMPAGE

'SPAWN' RUMORS ON RISE

SPAWN ALLEY FOUND

POLICE DENY SPAWN EXISTS

NEW SPAWN ATTACK

THE HOLY BIBLE

I'LL PROVE WORTHY OF YOUR EMPIRE. I CAN'T BEGIN TO KNOW YOUR GREAT PLANS, LORD, BUT I MUST PROFESS THAT IT DOES CONFUSE ME.

I'M FORCED TO USE TECHNOLOGY FROM THE SECULAR WORLD.

I'VE SPENT THE MAJORITY OF MY FORTUNE PREPARING FOR YOUR KINGDOM.

WHY DO YOU FORSAKE ME?

THE JET IS FUELED AND READY TO LEAVE FOR NEW YORK, MR. KRAHN.

WHY HAVE I BEEN CURSED?

HERE YOU ARE:

...THE 'RED LIGHT' DISTRICT. YOU BE CARE-FUL. THEY *DO* LIKE OUTSIDERS 'ROUND HERE.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONCERN, THOUGH I *DO* PLAN ON HAVING A RATHER PLEASANT EVENING.

'SCUSE ME. 'SCUSE ME. MISTER.

GOT SOME SPARE CHANGE? Y'SEE, MY *HEALTH'S* NOT TOO GOOD AND I NEED TO GET SOME NEW *MEDICINE.* I *SWEAR!*

BURP

ADULT BOOK STORE

LIVE GIRLS LIVE

MY ILLNESS GIVES ME *GAS,* TOO.

HEY STUD.

YOU HAVE THE MONEY, I'VE GOT THE *TIME.*

MAKE US BOTH FEEL *GOOD,* I PROMISE.

HOUSE OF PAIN

FORGIVE THEM, FATHER, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

CHAPEL KILLED BOBBIE TO GET AT ME. HE WAS JUST AN INNOCENT VICTIM.

I'M GOING TO HAVE TO START LIVING WITH THE FACT THAT A LOT OF BLOOD HAS BEEN SPILLED IN MY NAME.

I'M GETTING SICK OF THAT.

ANOTHER MAN DIED BECAUSE I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.* IT'S TIME I STARTED HELPING YOU GUYS INSTEAD OF HURTING.

*LAST ISSUE--Tom.

C'MON, AL, THIS *AIN'T* YOUR FAULT. YOU DON'T *ASK* FOR THESE WARS.

NEITHER DID BOBBIE. HE *LIKED* YOU, AL.

A *LOT.*

I KNOW HE DID.

CHAPEL COULDN'T HAVE CARED LESS. THEN THE FRIGGIN' IDIOT WENT AND BLEW HIS OWN HEAD OFF. THE PSYCHO!*

...DIDN'T ALLOW ME THE CHANCE TO KILL HIM MYSELF!

*YOUNGBLOOD ISSUES 8 + 10--Tom.

YOU'RE TALKING *CRAZY*, AL!

YOU DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE THEM. THEY'RE JUST PUSHING YOUR BUTTONS. THEY'RE *MESSED UP. ALL* OF THEM. YOU'RE *RIGHT*-- THEY DON'T GIVE A *CRAP* ABOUT US.

BUT I KNOW *YOU* DO.

HE'S *RIGHT*, AL.

SO DON'T GO DOING SOMETHING YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET. *BOBBIE* WOULDN'T WANT THAT.

THANKS, FELLAS.

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS WAR ISN'T GOING AWAY. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO **ACCEPT** THAT. MY EXISTENCE HAS SET THINGS IN MOTION THAT I CAN'T CONTROL.

BUT I'VE BEEN GIVEN **POWER**.

IT'S TIME I TRIED USING IT FOR SOMETHING POSITIVE.

YOUR *MAGIC?!* I THOUGHT IT *HURTS* TO USE IT.

SO DOES SEEING MY FRIENDS BEING MURDERED.

YOU THINK YOU CAN HEAL HIM OR SOMETHING?

YOU'D BE A *MIRACLE WORKER*.

THAT'S JUST THE PROBLEM. I'M NO GOD, JUST SOME TWISTED **HUMAN**. MY POWER KEEPS GIVING YOU A FALSE MESSAGE.

I WANT TO SEE IF BOBBIE CAN DO SOMETHING FOR ME.

LIKE WHAT?!

LIVE!

YEEEEOW!

WHAT A *TRIP!* HEY, BOOTSIE, DIDJA *MISS* ME?

BE HONEST.

HEY, *AL!* YOU *OKAY?*

NO.

HAVING NOW RESURRECTED THE DEAD, AL SIMMONS FALLS TO HIS KNEES. THE ***CONSEQUENCE*** *OF USING HIS ENERGY IN THAT MANNER CAUSES HIS BODY TO* ***SHUDDER.***

THOUGH IN PAIN, HE ALLOWS HIMSELF A WEAK SMILE BENEATH HIS MASK:

HE'S LOST VALUABLE ENERGY, BUT GAINED BACK SOME ***RESPECT.***

7:0:1:2

THE QUEENS, NEW YORK HOME OF **WANDA BLAKE.**

WHEN WILL YOU BE HOME?

NOT 'TIL SUPPER-TIME.

WERE YOU ABLE TO FIND OUT ANYTHING MORE FROM THE AGENCY?

YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT PEOPLE AROUND HERE PROTECT ONE ANOTHER WITH THEIR LIVES. FORTUNATELY, I WAS ABLE TO GET SOME PRETTY INTERESTING FILES OUT OF SUNDIN'S OFFICE.

GOOD. I HOPE WE CAN GET ***SOME*** KIND OF LEADS AS TO WHY THE C.I.A. WANTED TO MAKE YOU DISAPPEAR SO BADLY.

BELIEVE ME, I'M ***TRYING.*** MOST OF THESE FILES DON'T MAKE ANY SENSE, THOUGH IT LOOKS LIKE JASON WYNN IS INVOLVED SOMEHOW. I JUST CAN'T TELL HOW DEEP.

ANYWAYS, I'M BRINGING THESE FILES HOME, ALL 57 OF THEM. MAYBE WE CAN MAKE SOME HEADWAY... ***AFTER*** CYAN'S ASLEEP.

HOW'S SHE DOING, ANYWAYS?

Oh, A BIT FUSSY. I'M GOING TO PUT HER DOWN FOR A NAP.

OKAY, SWEETHEART, I'M GOING TO DO A BIT MORE WORK WITH THESE FILES...

"... SEE IF I CAN'T CATCH THE BOYS WITH THEIR *BACKS* TURNED!"

BOOM

THERE HE IS, SIRE!

THANK YOU, MY FLOCK. YOU'VE SERVED ME WELL.

YOU'LL NOT BE FORGOTTEN WHEN I RECEIVE *THE POWER*. I WILL NOT SHUN YOU, AS *I* HAVE BEEN.

SO PROMISES THE CURSE!

BELIEVE US, IT'S OUR PLEASURE. THE GUY WAS A SCAB.

THOUGHT HE *OWNED* THE ALLEYS.

IN HIS WEAKENED STATE, SPAWN AND HIS COSTUME WERE ILL-PREPARED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM THE SUDDEN AMBUSH.

SO IT ENDS. I'D HAVE THOUGHT THIS 'SPAWN' WOULD BE BETTER PREPARED. A TRUE BELIEVER WOULDN'T FALL SO QUICKLY.

NOT IF HE HAD *FAITH.*

MERE HUMAN TECHNOLOGY SHOULDN'T PREVAIL SO EASILY.

MAYBE I'VE MADE A MISTAKE IN THINKING MY LORD GAVE HIM HIS POWERS. THE MASTER CHOOSES ONLY THE ***STRONG-WILLED*** FOLLOWERS.

OBVIOUSLY, THIS CAPED CREATURE IS ***NOT*** FROM THE HEAVENS, NOR SOMEONE WITH ***DIVINE POWERS.***

HE'S MERELY AN AGENT OF ***SATAN,*** MAKING A MOCKERY OF OUR BELIEFS.

LET HIM ROT IN HELL.

MAN!

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THE ***SIZE*** OF THAT ***HOLE!***

WHY'D THEY *DO* THAT? WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?!

I DUNNO, BUT DO YOU THINK HE'S *DEAD*?

WHA...?

HIS CAPE'S *MOVING*...!

THAT'S GOTTA BE *GOOD*. C'MON, LET'S MOVE HIM OUTTA THE WAY.

UMPF!

UNG!

UNG!

NT!

puff

GRUNT!

MMMPF!

HNNKT

CRIPES!

SPAWN WEIGHS NEARLY 500 POUNDS.

*HAVING A BODY MADE OF PSYCHO-PLASM, WITH A DENSITY GREATER THAN CEMENT, WILL **DO** THAT.*

HE WON'T *BUDGE!*

NOW WHAT?

MAYBE WE CAN ***LEAVE*** HIM 'TIL WE GET MORE HELP.

SUDDENLY, THE NIGHT AIR IS SHATTERED WITH THE WAILING SOUNDS OF...

WRETCH

NOW WHAT?

DRINK MOMMA-- PEEZ!

IN A MINUTE, CYAN.

ARE YOU SURE TAKING THOSE FILES WON'T GET YOU INTO TROUBLE?

NOT REALLY. BUT SOMETHING'S GOT PEOPLE ACTING WEIRD.

IT'S LIKE EVERYONE'S TRYING TO FORGET THAT I WAS ON THE AGENCY'S HIT LIST.* ACTING LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED.

*STARTING WITH ISSUE 12 -- Tom.

EITHER THEY'RE ***SCARED*** OR SOMEONE'S GOT SOMETHING ON ONE OF THE BIG BOYS. MAYBE BOTH.

GOOD!

AFTER WHAT THEY ***DID*** TO YOU, I DON'T HAVE ANY SYMPATHY FOR THEM.

FOR HEAVEN'S ***SAKE***, TERRY, YOU WERE ALMOST ***KILLED!*** AND WE ***STILL*** DON'T KNOW WHY.

WELL, HOPEFULLY, THIS STACK OF FILES WILL GIVE US A FEW ANSWERS.

IT SEEMS SOMETHING ***BIG*** HAD TO TRIGGER ALL THOSE EVENTS. I MEAN, YOU JUST ***DON'T*** TICK OFF THE C.I.A., POLICE, MOB ***AND*** F.B.I.

AND THAT COSTUMED GUY, ***SPAWN.*** SOMEHOW HE KNEW ME. BUT WHY'D HE SAVE MY BUTT? I'D BE DEAD MEAT IF HE HADN'T SHOWED.

MAYBE ***HE'S*** THE ONE THAT'S GOT THEM IN A TIZZY.

WHAT'S ***REALLY SPOOKY*** IS THE GUY ***KNEW MY NAME.***

WEEO WEEO WEEO

JIMMY, YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO. GO. HURRY!

EVENIN', OFFICER. WHAT'S UP?

THERE'S BEEN A REPORT OF LOUD GUN BLASTS AROUND HERE. KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT?

NOPE.

NOPE.

THEN WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR BUDDY, THERE?

Oh, YOU MEAN *AL*. THE GUY'S A *SLOPPY* DRUNK. CAN'T HOLD HIS LIQUOR WORTH A DARN.

WELL, I NEED MY CAR THROUGH THIS ALLEY, SO GET YOUR PAL *OUT* OF MY WAY, *NOW!*

Um... SURE. RIGHT AWAY.

EEEEE!

WHA...?

THAT CAME FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION.

BETTER HURRY.

THE OFFICER SLAMS HIS CAR INTO REVERSE, RUSHING TO THE AID OF A SIMULATED "VICTIM".

THAT JIMMY SCREAMS LIKE A BLOODY WOMAN.

OKAY, WE BOUGHT OURSELVES SOME TIME, BUT HE'S *STILL* TOO HEAVY TO MOVE.

JUST KEEP HIM COVERED WITH THAT HAT AND TRENCH COAT. I'M GOING TO GET A FEW MORE GUYS TO HELP.

HEAR ME, BROTHERS! THE PLACE YOU LIVE IN HOLDS MUCH *EVIL*. I HAVE *ALREADY* VANQUISHED *ONE* OF SATAN'S MINIONS, THANKS TO *YOUR* EFFORTS.

BUT THERE ARE STILL TOO MANY UNBELIEVERS IN THESE STREETS... THOSE WHO WOULD PROTECT THE **SINNERS** AROUND US.

FAITH! ... AND THE *FEAR* OF *GOD* THESE VIRTUES MAKE UP THE *MORAL FIBER* OF THIS GREAT COUNTRY!

BLIND, UNQUESTIONING *FAITH*.

THEY ALL LACK SOMETHING YOU AND I HOLD *DEAR*:

HEAR MY TALE, FRIENDS...

PEACE. IT'S ALL I DESIRED WHEN I WAS A BOY. WHILE THE OTHER KIDS PLAYED, I PRAYED. AS YEARS ROLLED BY, THOUGH, IT SEEMED AS IF I WAS BEING IGNORED.

EVERY DAY WAS PLAGUED WITH INJUSTICE. THE PEACE I DREAMED OF SEEMED SO DISTANT.

THEN I REALIZED ***WHY***. I HAD NOT MADE A PERSONAL SACRIFICE. WHAT COULD I GIVE?

AS AN OFFERING TOWARD THE END OF SUFFERING, THEN, I TOOK OUT MY LEFT EYE WITH A SHARP STICK. THEN I MARKED MY FACE WITH A CUT DEEP ENOUGH TO SCAR ME FOREVER.

EVEN WITH THAT, MY PRAYERS WENT UNANSWERED, SO I KNEW I'D HAVE TO GIVE ***MORE*** OF MYSELF.

WITHOUT HESITATION, I SACRIFICED MY RIGHT ARM.

THE DOCTORS SAID I WANTED ATTENTION, THAT MY ACTIONS DEFIED LOGIC. SELF-MUTILATION, THEY SAID, WAS NOT THE ACT OF A RATIONAL PERSON.

BUT THEY MISSED THE POINT. IT WAS ***TRUTH*** I WANTED. IT WOULD BE FOUND THROUGH ***FAITH***, NOT LOGIC. BUT ***THEY*** COULDN'T UNDERSTAND, SO I BEGAN TO LIVE THE WAY THEY WANTED ME TO. WENT TO COLLEGE. STARTED BUSINESSES. ACQUIRED FORTUNES.

MONEY ENABLED ME TO BUILD A NEW AND ***STRONGER*** ARM. MY FAITH BECAME EVEN ***MORE*** RESILIENT.

SO NOW I AWAIT HIS BLESSINGS. HIS ***POWER!*** HIS ***TRUTH!***

YES. TRUTH.

CRUNCH

I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING THAT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER:

MAKE SURE YOUR ENEMY IS **COMPLETELY** DEAD BEFORE YOU WALK AWAY.

OTHER-WISE YOU'LL THINK YOU'RE BEING CHASED BY A GHOST.

THEN PARANOIA STARTS TO EAT YOU ALIVE.

MY ARM... YOU'VE DESTROYED IT! HOW *DARE* YOU!!

SHUT UP!

I'M TIRED OF YOU SICK PIGS.

YOUR TWISTED LOGIC GIVES YOU SOME SORTA PERMISSION FROM UP HIGH TO GO AROUND SHOOTING PEOPLE.

WELL, SCREW YOU AND WHOEVER SENT YOU.

BLASPHEMER!

BLASPHEMER!

I'LL *NOT* SUBMIT TO THE DEVIL'S CHILD.

MY *LORD* WILL TAKE CARE OF ME, SO DO YOUR WORST. I WILL ACCEPT MY BURDEN.

GOOD.

'CAUSE I'M IN A *BAD* MOOD.

I WON'T EVEN **USE** THESE GUNS TO KICK YOUR BUTT. USING MY **FISTS** WILL MAKE ME FEEL MUCH BETTER.

WHOEVER'S BACKING YOU HAS GOT TO BE ONE SICK PUPPY.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?!

YOU HEARD ME.

YOU SHALL NEVER SPEAK OF HIM LIKE THAT. NOT EVER AGAIN!

UNFF!

IN MY TIME I'VE SUFFERED ENOUGH INSOLENCE FOR ANY TEN MEN.

THE TIME HAS COME TO *SILENCE* THE NON-BELIEVERS. *YOU*, RED-CLOAKED DEMON, SHALL BOW AT THE FEET OF MY MASTER.

YOU'RE INSANE.

YOU'RE *MISTAKEN*, YOU DAMNED FOOL.

I KNOW *EXACTLY* WHAT I'M DOING, AND THE REWARDS FOR MY ACTIONS WILL BE *GREAT*. THIS TIME, MY LORD *CANNOT* IGNORE ME.

THIS TIME HE'LL ACKNOWLEDGE MY EXISTENCE!

VICTORY!

THE DEVIL WILL *NEVER* SUCCEED IN HIS BATTLE WITH GOOD. *HEAR* ME, MY FOLLOWERS. TONIGHT WE WILL...

EAT ME, OLD MAN!

KIK!

SPAK!

SWAK!

BACK OFF, SPAWN! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO LAY ANOTHER HAND ON HIM. NOT UNLESS YOU INTEND ON GOING THROUGH *US.*

ACCORDING TO ***THIS,*** INTERNAL AFFAIRS WAS FED FALSE INFORMATION ON THE DISAPPEARANCE AND POSSIBLE THEFT OF SOME MILITARY HARDWARE.* NOW THAT INFO ***HAD*** TO COME ABOVE. BUT WHOEVER THE THIEVES ***WERE,*** THEY WOVE A PRETTY CONVOLUTED SCHEME TO KEEP THEMSELVES FROM BEING DETECTED.

FROM WHAT I WAS ABLE TO MAKE OUT, THE ***MAFIA'S*** TIED TO ALL THIS, TOO. IT CAN'T BE COINDENCE, BUT I CAN'T FIGURE THE CONNECTION. ILLEGAL ARMS TRADE?

YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING. THIS BUSINESS HAS BECOME SO BLURRED IT'S GOING TO TAKE SOME PRETTY LONG HOURS TO FIND THE STARTING POINT OF ALL THIS. I PROBABLY HAVEN'T SAID IT YET, BUT I'M REALLY ***PROUD*** OF YOU FOR DECIDING TO HELP ME, WANDA.

THANKS.

I KNOW YOU DID, BUT THIS IS SOMETHING I ***WANT*** TO DO.

I'M GOING TO PUT CYAN DOWN. BE BACK IN A MINUTE.

OKAY, SWEETHEART.

TERRY'S GOING THROUGH SO MUCH. IF I CAN FIGURE OUT EVEN ONE PIECE, THAT MIGHT HELP HIM FEEL LIKE THINGS ARE GOING FORWARD.

THE C.I.A. AND F.B.I. ARE WAY OUT OF MY LEAGUE.

BUT THIS "SPAWN." HE KNOWS TERRY. ***HOW?*** I'LL FOCUS ON FINDING ***THAT*** ANSWER.

I ALWAYS TRIED TO AVOID PUTTING YOU THROUGH ANYTHING LIKE THIS, ESPECIALLY AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO AL.

*'WAY BACK IN ISSUE SIX-- Tom.

IN THE SQUALOR OF NEW YORK'S ALLEYS, A DEAD-MAN-TURNED-DEMON, DRIVEN TO RAGE, **EXPLODES** THROUGH A GAUNTLET OF HIS FRIENDS TO REACH HIS TARGET.

HE'S **BEYOND** CARING ABOUT WHO'S IN HIS WAY.

THE THIRST FOR **REVENGE** HAS CONSUMED HIM. **NO ONE** WILL STOP HIM TONIGHT... NOT EVEN THE THREAT OF **DIVINE RETRIBUTION.**

THE END?

MY GOD EVERY ONE OF THEM.

THEY'RE ALL FRIGGIN' PSYCHOS...

...AND THEY'VE ALL TAKEN AIM STRAIGHT AT ME.

WELL, NOW THEY'LL GET THE MESSAGE.

EVEN BETTER...

...THEY'LL SEE IT!...

...AND IF THEY'RE SMART, THEY'LL WALK AWAY.

NO ONE'S GOING TO WALK ON MY TURF AGAIN WITHOUT SEEING A WARNING SIGN.

SHOULD HAVE DONE THIS SOONER.

SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE GRAVE, THIS MAN, NOW CALLED SPAWN, HAS BEEN HUNTED.

AND HOUNDED. AND BEATEN. AND SHOT AT.

HE'S BECOME LIKE A RAGING BULL PENNED UP TOO LONG. ANGER HAS BEEN SMOLDERING DEEP INSIDE AND HE'S READY TO EXPLODE. THIS MAN ONCE TRAINED TO BE SO RATIONAL IN HIS EVERY MOVE.

LORD HAVE MERCY ON THE NEXT FOOL TO CROSS HIS PATH.

YOU SHALL DIE FOR THIS!!

SHUT UP.

WATCH YOUR *TONE*, HELLSPAWN. MY TIME WILL COME. THOUGH YOU MAY HAVE BROKEN ME PHYSICALLY, MY *SPIRIT* HAS BEEN FORTIFIED.

I'VE *SEEN* THE ERROR OF MY WAYS. RELIED FAR TOO HEAVILY ON THE LORD. HE'S *FORSAKEN* ME. I UNDERSTAND THAT NOW.

EVEN AFTER ALL I'VE GIVEN OF MYSELF, I SHALL NEVER ENTER HIS KINGDOM.

SO I CAST AWAY MY ALLEGIANCE. IT'S TIME TO FIGHT MY BATTLES *ALONE*... AND MY WAR STARTS WITH *YOU*, DEMON. THOUGH YOU'VE TAKEN A HUMAN SHAPE, I KNOW *WHAT* YOU ARE...

...WHERE YOU *COME* FROM.

LIKE ME, YOU HAVE *ALSO* BEEN CURSED.

IT *SADDENS* ME THAT I MUST KILL YOU.

DO YOU *HEAR* ME?

AS CLOUDS GATHER FOR AN IMMINENT RAINFALL, WANDA DRIVES ACROSS THE TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE INTO NEW YORK CITY.

SHE MUSES HOW THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SHE'S TAKEN THE CAR INTO THE BIG APPLE.

I MUST BE CRAZY.

DIDN'T LIKE HAVING TO LIE TO TERRY ABOUT WHERE I WAS GOING, BUT HE'D HAVE ***NEVER*** LET ME GO ALONE.

THE DUMB THING IS, HE'D'VE BEEN RIGHT.

THE CHANCES OF ME BEING ABLE TO FIND THE SPAWN ARE PRETTY REMOTE, ESPECIALLY SINCE HE'S BEEN ABLE TO DODGE THE MEDIA SO WELL. ...*AND* THE AUTHORITIES...!

IT'S LIKE HE'S A *GHOST*...

...COMING OUT OF *NOWHERE*, THEN DIS-APPEARING INTO THE DARK.

"SPAWN" NOW IDENTIFIED IN BOWERY

GREEN FIRE GRAFFITI --"SPAWN"

"SPAWN" DENIES KILLINGS

BUT HE'S GOT THE ANSWERS TO SOME VERY SERIOUS QUESTIONS.

LIKE...***WHO*** TRIED TO KILL MY HUSBAND?

*AN IRONIC QUESTION, CONSIDERING THAT HER **FIRST** HUSBAND, AL SIMMONS, WAS KILLED...: AND IS NOW THE VERY ONE WHOM SHE IS IN SEARCH OF.*

IT'S NOT FAIR, WHAT THEY DID.

"HE'S HAD TO *ENDURE* SO MUCH, SINCE HIS OWN *FRIENDS* AT THE AGENCY TURNED ON HIM. I KNOW *THAT'S* REALLY EATING AT HIM.

"HIS INJURIES ARE STILL BOTHERING HIM, BUT HE'S PUTTING ON A STRONG SHOW FOR ME AND CYAN.

"PLUS, HE'S TRYING TO DEAL WITH HIS SO-CALLED CO-WORKERS AGAIN, AS IF THEY HADN'T BEEN SPYING ON HIM IN CONJUNCTION WITH *OTHER* AGENCIES.

"IF THE MOB WANTED HIM DEAD, THAT MAKES *SOME* SENSE, BECAUSE THEY'RE THE BAD GUYS...

"...BUT BY HIS *OWN PEOPLE...!* THEY'RE *SUPPOSED* TO BE ON *HIS* SIDE. DAMN THEM ALL.

"I *KNOW* IT'S TAKING A TOLL ON TERRY, NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE TRIES TO HIDE IT. I'VE CAUGHT HIM A COUPLE OF TIMES, JUST STARING OFF INTO THE DARKNESS. HE LOOKED SO... BROKEN.

"HE'D BE DEAD IF IT WASN'T FOR THAT *SPAWN*. I NEED TO KNOW WHY *HE* CAME TO TERRY'S RESCUE, WHILE EVERYONE *ELSE* HAD TURNED THEIR BACKS.*

"TERRY WORKS IN AN *OFFICE*, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE. WHERE COULD HE HAVE *MET* ANYONE LIKE THAT?"

*ISSUES 21 TO 24 --Tom.

CONSUMED IN THOUGHT, WANDA BARELY PAYS ATTENTION TO HER DECREPIT SURROUNDINGS.

HEY, GILMOUR...

YEAH, I SEE...

I'M KING HERE!

THIS IS MY HOME. HOW DARE YOU COME HERE AND TRY TO TURN MY PEOPLE AGAINST ME?!

BELIEVE ME, CURSE, YOU'RE IN NO POSITION TO THREATEN ANYONE!

I MAKE THE RULES HERE!

YOU GET THAT THROUGH YOUR THICK SKULL.

SO YOU RANT ABOUT REVENGE ALL YOU WANT. I'VE GOT A FEW THINGS TO TAKE CARE OF.

I'LL BE BACK.

BUT DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE, 'CAUSE I'M NOT CLOSE TO BEING FINISHED WITH YOU.

RAISED IN A CLOSE NEIGHBORHOOD, WANDA HAD RARELY STRAYED FROM THE WATCHFUL EYES OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

EVEN IN COLLEGE SHE WAS CAUTIOUS ABOUT HER AFTER-HOUR ACTIVITIES.

IT WASN'T THAT SHE WAS TIMID, OR A PRUDE-- JUST VERY FOCUSED ON THE PERSONAL PATHS SHE WANTED TO WALK.

PUTTING HERSELF IN SUCH POTENTIAL DANGER **NOW** SHOWS THE DEPTH OF HER COMMITT-MENT TO HELPING HER HUSBAND.

AS THE NIGHT AIR'S TEMPERATURE BEGINS TO DROP, HER HEARTBEAT INCREASES.

FLINCHING AT EVERY SOUND AND MOVE-MENT, SHE KEEPS TELLING HERSELF THAT IT'S ALL JUST HER IMAGINATION RUNNING AWAY WITH HER.

NOT QUITE.

13 SIDE UP

HEE HEE HEEEE.

OOOH... THIS JUST *KILLS* ME. BRIBES. POLITICAL FAVORS. CALL GIRLS. THIS FILE'S FILLED WITH ENOUGH INFO TO FRY CHIEF BANKS TO A *CRISP*.

LIFE IS *GOOD!*

THOUGH I DO ADMIRE YOUR VIRTUOSO FLAIR FOR *GLOATING*, I HAVE ONE SMALL QUESTION, SIR.

SHOOT.

I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT SPAWN WANTED THIS DELIVERED TO THE CHIEF SO HE'D PULL THE TROOPS OFF THEIR SEARCHES OF THE ALLEYS.* YOU KNOW, A SIMPLE BLACK-MAIL THING.

YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

WELL, ISN'T SPAWN GOING TO BE A BIT *PERTURBED* WITH YOU FOR NOT DOING AS HE ASKED?

*ISSUE 24 -- Tom.

AWW — *LIGHTEN UP*, TWITCH. THE CHIEF'S BEEN A PAIN IN MY REAR FOR YEARS. NOW I'VE FINALLY GOT SOMETHING THAT'LL MAKE HIM *BACK OFF*. AIN'T *NO* WAY I'M GOING...

UH?!

CRIPES! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! THIS CAN'T BE *TRUE! NO* ONE'S THAT SICK!

WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT TO FIND OUT WHAT IT IS.

BRIBES. POLITICAL FAVORS. TWO-BIT WHORES. THESE THINGS ARE *FULL* OF DIRTY LAUNDRY. BUT THERE STILL ISN'T ANYTHING THAT EVEN *REMOTELY* TIES ME INTO *ANY* OF THIS.

THERE HAS TO BE *SOME* KINDA CONNECTION... *SOME*WHERE... THAT WOULD INSPIRE THE AGENCY TO TRY TO *MURDER* ME.

JUST GOTTA KEEP LOOKING.

D-DEEEP

D-DEEEP

HELLO?

HI, TERRY. THIS IS SHEILA EGGER. IS WANDA THERE?

Um... SHE SAID SHE WAS GOING OVER TO YOUR PLACE. SAID THERE WAS SOME NEW CHARITY YOU HAD TO DISCUSS.

NOPE. I HAVEN'T TALKED TO HER ALL DAY. HOPE SHE'S ALL RIGHT.

TERRY GOES STONE COLD SILENT. THE POSSIBILITIES OF WHAT MIGHT BE HAPPENING ARE TOO HORRIFIC TO THINK ABOUT.

AS THE MINUTES TURN INTO HOURS, WANDA FINDS THE PATH LEADING TO SPAWN BLOCKED AT EVERY TURN.

THOUGH SHE'S QUESTIONED OVER THREE DOZEN OF THE HOMELESS, NOTHING HAS COME OF IT.

EITHER THIS CAPED VIGILANTE **DOESN'T EXIST,** OR THESE VAGRANTS HAVE AGREED TO KEEP HIS WHEREABOUTS A SECRET.

SHE CONTINUES HER SEARCH...

NEVER HEARD OF THE FELLER.

BUT IF IT MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE, I'D PUT ON A PAIR OF SHORTS *TOO,* IF IT MEANT *YOU'D* COME LOOKING FOR ME.

AND I'D *LET* YOU CATCH ME...

IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

RED CAPE?

=hic=

NOW THAT'S A *GOOD* ONE. PEOPLE 'ROUND HERE THINK *I'M* CRAZY... BUT A DUDE WITH *SKULLS* AND CRAP... THAT'S *FUNNY!*

YOU'VE GOT NO BUSINESS BEING IN THESE ALLEYS.

FINALLY, SHE RESORTS TO **SIMPLER** TACTICS...

...AND SHE QUICKLY FINDS A BELIEVER IN FREE AGENCY.

LADY, YOU JUST BOUGHT YOURSELF A TOUR GUIDE.

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS RIGHT?

TRUST ME, BABE.

UP THERE!

JUST AROUND THAT CORNER AND DOWN A BIT. YOU SHOULD FIND SOME-THING.

BUT *I* AIN'T GOING NEAR HIS SPOT. THE RED FREAK'S A *LUNATIC*.

"SO, YOU'RE ON YOUR *OWN*, LADY."

HELLO?

IS ANYONE HERE?

CAUTIOUSLY, SHE TURNS THE LAST CORNER.

GOD, *NO!*

PLEASE ...

SAVE ME

NO! NO! STAY AWAY!

SHE FLEES.

UMPF.

SHE DOESN'T GET TOO FAR.

TOK

SPAT!

MMMMMM!

YOU'RE A PRETTY ONE, TOO.

THAT'S JUST GOING TO BE A *BONUS*!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

PLEASE DON'T...

GIMME GIMME. SHE'S MINE.

NO WAY, I SAW HER *FIRST*!

BOYS. *BOYS!* THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF TIME FOR *ALL* OF US!

MROW!

Uh?

FRIGGIN' *CAT'S* SURE SCARED OF *SOME*-THING.

WHO'S *IN* THERE?

I SAID, WHO'S IN THERE?!

GYAA!

SCH!

WHUD!

KCH!

SCARED AND CONFUSED, THE THIRD ASSAILANT DARTS INTO A SIDE ALLEY.

KRAK

SNAP

KRUNCH

THE SICKENING SOUNDS OF BONES BREAKING AND CARTILAGE TEARING ASSAULT WANDA'S EARS.

THERE ISN'T A SCREAM TO ACCOMPANY ANY OF IT.

WHO'S NEXT?

HAUNTINGLY, HE EMERGES FROM THE SHADOWS, A SPECTRE OF DEATH PREPARED-- EVEN WAITING-- FOR THE NEXT MOVE.

SEVERAL YEARS AS A C.I.A-TRAINED **ASSASSIN** TAUGHT HIM TO FEAR **NOTHING.**

ESPECIALLY NOW, IN HIS NEW LIFE, HE IS THE ONE TO INSTILL THE **FEAR.**

INFLICT THE **PAIN.**

ANXIETY. DREAD. **PANIC.** ALL THE EMOTIONS SPAWN SOUGHT TO INSPIRE NOW SURGE THROUGH THIS FINAL STANDING GANG MEMBER.

HAVING PULLED THE JAGGED SHARD FROM HIS LEG, THE THUG REACTS INSTINCTIVELY.

BACK **OFF,** MAN! OR SHE **BUYS** IT!!

BACK AWAY FROM THAT WOMAN.

NOW!

HOW DARE YOU...

...THREATEN ME?!

SPUT

DON'T BE AN IDIOT.

SCREW YOU!

KRAK KAK KK

THE THUMB WILL BE THE ONLY USEABLE DIGIT ON HIS RIGHT HAND AFTER TONIGHT.

BANG.

YOU'RE DEAD.

*FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE WAS FOUR YEARS OLD, DOUGIE "MAD DOG" GILMOUR **WETS HIS PANTS** AND **DOESN'T CARE.***

GET OUTTA MY SIGHT.

DEAR LORD.

YOU OKAY, LADY? NEXT TIME, YOU MIGHT WANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHERE YOU'RE WALKING.

I-I'M SORRY... I DIDN'T MEAN FOR ANY OF THIS TO HAPPEN.

WANDA?!

HOW...

HOW DO YOU KNOW TERRY AND I?

WHO *ARE* YOU?

SOMEONE WHO CARES.

I NEED TO *KNOW* SOMETHING. WHY DID YOU SAVE MY HUSBAND? HE'S SO CONFUSED RIGHT NOW. NONE OF THIS MAKES ANY *SENSE* TO HIM.

OR TO ME.

I SAW WHAT YOU DID TO THOSE MEN JUST NOW.

YOU COULD HAVE KILLED THEM. I DIDN'T WANT THAT.

I CAME HERE FOR ANOTHER REASON.

TO THANK YOU.

"WHEN ALL OF THIS WAS GOING ON, I DIDN'T WANT TO BELIEVE ANY OF IT. TERRY, BEING *INVESTIGATED* BY INTERNAL AFFAIRS... *DEAD MEN*, CONNECTED TO THE MAFIA, ON MY *FRONT LAWN*... *TERRY BLAMED FOR THE MURDERS!*... EVERY-ONE HAD *TURNED* ON HIM.

"HE NEARLY DIED FROM THE BEATING *OVERTKILL* GAVE HIM. HE'S ALIVE, THOUGH-- THANKS TO YOU. YOUR HELP SAVED HIS LIFE.*

"I COULDN'T BEAR TO LOSE HIM. I LOVE HIM SO MUCH. WE HAVE A LITTLE GIRL, BUT YOU PROBABLY *KNOW* THAT...

* ISSUE 24 -- Tom.

...SHE NEEDS HER DAD. SO ***VERY*** MUCH. WE ***BOTH*** DO.

BUT...

I...

YOU ***SCARE*** ME. I KNOW I SHOULD BE ***GRATEFUL*** TO YOU FOR SAVING ME TONIGHT, BUT WHAT YOU DID-- IT...

IT LOOKED LIKE YOU ***ENJOYED*** YOURSELF. THAT'S ***SCARING*** ME.

PLEASE, WANDA, DON'T TURN AWAY. I ***AM*** HERE TO HELP.

HE RAISES HIS HAND, TO WIPE SOME MUD FROM HER CHEEK.

*SHE **RECOILS**, FEARING THAT HE IS ABOUT TO **STRIKE** HER.*

YOURE THAT AFRAID OF ME?

I'M SORRY.

NO. THIS IS MY FAULT.

HERE. BEFORE I GO...

I WANT YOU TO HAVE SOME-THING.

YOU DID *MORE* THAN SAVE A LIFE. YOU'VE ALLOWED US TO REMAIN A *FAMILY.* THAT MEANS *EVERY-THING* TO ME.

I *KNOW* IT WAS WRONG FOR ME TO COME HERE TONIGHT. *FORGIVE* ME.

I WON'T COME BACK. *EVER* AGAIN.

WAIT, WANDA...

PLEASE.

LATER.

HE'S BEEN STARING AT THE PHOTO FOR THREE HOURS.

*IT'LL BE ANOTHER **TWO** BEFORE HE PUTS IT DOWN.*

7:0:1:2

NOTE: THIS STORY BEGINS WHERE WE LEFT SPAWN AT THE CLOSE OF THE ANGELA MINISERIES, ISSUE 3. -- Tom

HEY, MISTER. BET YOU'RE GONNA GET IN *BIG* TROUBLE FOR GETTIN' ALL *DIRTY* LIKE THAT.

WHAT YOU DOIN' ON THE *SIDEWALK*, MISTER, huh?

YOU PLAYIN' A GAME? C'N *I* PLAY *TOO*?

DON'T YOU GOT A *HOME* TO GO TO?

YOU WANNA PLAY *BALL*?

WEAKENED FROM HIS BATTLE IN HEAVEN, SPAWN STRUGGLES TO REMAIN CONSCIOUS.

SORRY, KID...

NOT RIGHT NOW.

HE LOSES THE FIGHT.

KRAK

MISTER! C'MON-- UNGH! YOU NEED SOME HELP.

MMPH!

LITTLE ANDY FRANK HAS NO IDEA THAT HE IS TRYING TO LIFT OVER 400 lbs. OF PSYCHO-PLASM. HE'S ONLY INTENT ON HELPING.

HE SURPRISES HIMSELF BY BEING ABLE TO LIFT A GROWN MAN. HE IS UNAWARE THAT THE CHAINS ATTACHED AT SPAWN'S WAIST HAVE COME TO LIFE.

grunt! YOU'RE KINDA *LIGHT*, ACTUALLY.

CREATED IN THE DEPTHS OF HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL, THE **CHAINS** INSTINCTIVELY HELP THEIR HOST, BEARING SPAWN'S TOTAL WEIGHT.

MOMMY?

NO! Giggle- *I'M* NOT YOUR MOTHER, BUT I THINK WE SHOULD GET OFF THE STREET. YOU LOOK FUNNY.

PUSHING THE WAGON FORWARD, THE **CHAINS** SHATTER THE **CEMENT** IN A SERIES OF FORCEFUL SHOVES.

KRK!

KRK!

THOUGH IGNORANT OF THE FACT, ANDY WOULD BE VERY THANKFUL TO KNOW HIS WAGON WAS STRESS-TESTED AT THE FACTORY TO WITHSTAND 450 POUNDS.

LUCKILY.

CHK!

CHK!

WHERE WE GOING?

HE NEVER *DOES.*

WELTS AND BRUISES COVER HIS BACK LIKE AN UGLY ROADMAP.

HOME. WHA'D'YA *THINK?* THOUGH I CAN'T LET *PA* SEE YOU. HE WOULDN'T *UNDER-STAND.*

AS HIS SHIRT COMES UNTUCKED, IT EXPOSES MORE THAN JUST FLESH.

BEFORE HE CAN ASK, SPAWN AGAIN LOSES HIS FOCUS.

THE QUESTIONS WILL HAVE TO WAIT.

QUEENS, NEW YORK... THE HOME OF WANDA BLAKE AND TERRY FITZGERALD...

I'M SO *SORRY*, SWEETHEART. I GUESS I THOUGHT I COULD *HELP* SOMEHOW.

AND YOU *ARE* HELPING, WANDA, BUT NONE OF THIS IS SO IMPORTANT THAT IT'S WORTH RISKING YOUR *LIFE*. IF THE BAD GUYS WANT TO COME AFTER *US*, *FINE*. WE CAN'T STOP *THAT*.

BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO GO INTO *THEIR* DEN.

THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING IN THOSE *FILES* I BROUGHT HOME... SOMETHING WE CAN INVESTIGATE FROM A SAFER DISTANCE.

I KNOW-- IT WAS RECKLESS OF ME TO GO OUT THERE.

IT'S JUST THAT I KNOW HOW MUCH ALL OF THIS IS BOTHERING YOU, WHETHER YOU'LL *ADMIT* IT OR *NOT*. AND THE ONLY PERSON WHO SEEMED TO BE ON YOUR SIDE WAS *SPAWN*...

...THOUGH I HAVE NO IDEA *WHY*.

BUT YOU SHOULD HAVE *SEEN* HIM, TERRY. HE *BRUTALIZED* THOSE THREE MEN IN A MATTER OF *SECONDS*. DIDN'T LET UP 'TIL THEY WERE JUST MORE GARBAGE IN HIS ALLEY. *

I WAS SO SCARED.

ANYWAY, FOR SOME REASON I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT HIM. IS THAT CRAZY, OR WHAT?

NOT REALLY. BUT HE KNOWS THINGS HE SHOULDN'T, SO WE'LL JUST...

Uh?

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

YES.

OH NO!!

MOMMA! MOMMA! MOMMA!

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

HEY, YOU!

YOUR MOMMA SAID YOU WERE LEARNING HOW TO CLIMB OUT OF YOUR CRIB. I GUESS YOU FINALLY MASTERED IT, unh?

Giggle

LITTLE GIRL, *WHAT* AM I GOING TO DO WITH YOU *NOW*.

DAD!

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO NOW?

I'M NOT MADE OF MONEY!!

DADT! DADT! DADT!

YOU THINK WE CAN JUST EAT *OUT* EVERY DAY?!

WELL, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, BOY. I EXPECT A *HOT* MEAL WHEN I GET HOME FROM WORK, *NOT* SOME FRIGGIN' SWILL THAT'S *ICE COLD!*

I'LL GET YOU SOME BETTER STUFF, PA.

YOU'RE DAMN *RIGHT* YOU WILL. BUT FIRST I WANT YOU ON YOUR HANDS AND KNEES. I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU *EAT* THIS LIKE THE DOG THAT YOU ARE.

LEAVE HIM BE.

YOU GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

PUT HIM DOWN! YOU'RE HURTING HIM!

AGAIN.

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU TO MIND YOUR OWN *BUSINESS!*

I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU LATER.

EDDIE!

I'M NOT FINISHED WITH YOUR LITTLE BROTHER YET.

NO, PA.

PLEASE.

NESTLED AMONG THE ELM TREES IN A QUIET FLORENCE, ALABAMA NEIGHBORHOOD SITS A NONDESCRIPT WHITE HOUSE.

INSIDE, AN ALL-TOO FREQUENT ACTIVITY CONTINUES. THOUGH IT GETS NOISY AT TIMES, NO ONE PAYS MUCH ATTENTION...

...FOR WHAT COULD BE AMISS OR IMPROPER AT A WELL-RESPECTED POLICE OFFICER'S HOUSE?

LATER...

I'M SORRY ABOUT ALL THIS, ANDY. I WISH I COULD DO MORE. EVERY TIME I TRY AND GET HIM TO TAKE HIS ANGER OUT ON ME, HE JUST HITS YOU HARDER.

GOD, I WISH MOM WAS STILL ALIVE TO HELP YOU.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, I'M A BIG BOY NOW, I CAN TAKE IT.

HE DIDN'T BREAK ANYTHING.

YOU'LL HAVE TO WEAR LONG SLEEVES TO SCHOOL TOMORROW.

HEY!!

I *FORGOT!* THERE'S *SOME*THING YOU'VE *GOTTA* SEE.

C'MON.

WE'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH. HE SHOULD BE PASSED OUT BY NOW.

SO PREDICTABLE.

BUD LIGHT

SO! WHAT'S *UP?* WHAT'D'YA HAVE TO SHOW ME THAT'S SO !MPORTANT?

YOU'LL SEE. I'VE GOT IT HIDDEN IN THE SHACK.

THIS IS REALLY COOL.

NUTS

HELLO?

CLOSE THE DOOR.

PLEASE.

FRAGILE

Oh YEAH. I FORGOT YOU'RE NOT FEELING TOO GOOD. I JUST WANTED MY BROTHER TO MEET YOU, MR. SPAWN.

SAY *HI*, EDDIE.

Um.

HI.

SEE. I *TOLD* YA THIS WAS AWESOME.

HE'S KINDA LIKE MY OWN PERSONAL *E.T.!* DO YOU LIKE *REESE'S PIECES?*

PARDON?

NEVER MIND. HOW ABOUT YOUR *FINGER*-- CAN IT *GLOW?*

IT DID.

I'M NOT SURE IF IT STILL DOES.

I *TOLD* YA HE'S NOT FEELING WELL. HE FELL ON HIS HEAD-- FROM *HEAVEN.*

YOUR BRUISES... DID YOUR DAD GIVE THOSE TO YOU?

THIS IS UNBE*LIEV*ABLE. YOU'D BETTER NOT LET *PA* SEE HIM -- HE'D *REALLY* FLIP OUT.

GALS'

*ANGELA MINI-SERIES, ISSUE THREE-- Tom.

NOPE!

TH-THAT'S *CRAZY, RIGHT,* ANDY?

YUP.

WE JUST PLAY LOTS OF TACKLE FOOTBALL. *DAD DON'T EVER* TOUCH US.

C'MON, BOYS. DON'T BE AFRAID. YOU'RE NOT...

EDDIE! ANDY!

GET YOUR BUTTS IN HERE *RIGHT* NOW!

LET'S GO BEFORE HE COMES IN HERE!

THERE YOU ARE.

WHAT'RE YOU TWO, *BRAIN DEAD?* IT'S PAST TEN O'CLOCK! HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I *TOLD* YOU I WANT YOU IN BED *EARLY* ON SATURDAY.

"WE HAVE CHURCH TOMORROW."

Uh... *SORRY,* MR. SPAWN. WE'VE GOTTA GO. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW.

NEW YORK CITY POLICE HEADQUARTERS 12th PRECINCT

WOW!

HE'S EVEN SHADIER THAN I THOUGHT. LOOK AT THIS, TWITCH-- IT'S NO PROBLEM TO TRACK EVERY PHONE CALL MADE FROM THIS BUILDING...

EXCEPT...!

...SOMEHOW, ***CHIEF BANKS'*** OFFICE LINE CAN'T BE ACCESSED. ***PLUS,*** I'VE BEEN ABLE TO CHECK SOME OF HIS POLITICAL TIES, AND SO FAR ***EVERYTHING*** JIBES WITH THIS CONFIDENTIAL FILE SPAWN GAVE ME.

I'VE READ IT MYSELF, SIR. IT ***IS*** QUITE THOROUGH.

THE POSSIBILITY THAT CHIEF BANKS WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIRING BILLY KINCAID TO KILL A SENATOR'S CHILD... IT'S INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

HERE I THOUGHT KINCAID WAS JUST A CLASS-ONE NUTCASE, WORKING ON HIS OWN.

NO ***WONDER*** THE CHIEF WIGGED OUT WHEN KINCAID'S BODY WAS FOUND IN OUR OFFICE.* HE PROBABLY THOUGHT WE KNEW SOMETHING.

BANKS, LOU

KINCAID, WILLIAM

NO. A7FKOLPEHIZ4T

ONFIDENTIAL

WELL, ***NOW*** WE DO...!

* WAY BACK IN ISSUE 5-- Tom.

YOU KNOW, SIR, SOME OF THE INFO CONTAINED IN THIS FILE IS "*EYES ONLY*" STUFF.

NO ONE BUT HIGH-RANKING OPERATIVES OF CERTAIN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES WOULD HAVE ACCESS TO ANY OF IT.

MEANING OUR LITTLE RED-CAPED HERO JUST MIGHT BE A DISGRUNTLED GOVERNMENT BOY.

THAT'S OUR ***FIRST*** POTENTIAL LEAD ON HIM.

I'M GOING TO GET SOME COFFEE. NEED ANY-THING?

A NOSE JOB AND A MILLION BUCKS.

I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.

CHIEF BANKS

HELLO, CHIEF BANKS.

BURKE!

WHY ARE YOU ALWAYS MOVING SO ***SLOWLY?*** DON'T YOU FEEL AN ***URGENCY*** TO PERFORM YOUR DUTIES?!

STUFF IT. I'M NOT HERE TO EXCHANGE PLEASANTRIES.

THERE'VE BEEN INDICATIONS THAT YOU AND YOUR PARTNER WERE INVOLVED IN SOME UNOFFI-CIAL WORK. WELL, I'M HERE TO TELL YOU THAT IF I CATCH EVEN A ***HINT*** OF PERSONAL BUSINESS ON CITY TIME, I ***WILL*** HAVE YOU *SUSPENDED.*

YES, IT ***WAS*** RATHER UNFORTUNATE THAT INTERNAL AFFAIRS WASN'T ABLE TO NAIL ME FOR KINCAID'S DEATH.

WOULD HAVE REALLY MADE YOUR DAY, eh?

HOW DARE YOU!! YOU LISTEN ***HERE,*** I'M IN NO MOOD FOR...

DON'T TURN YOUR BACK ON ME!!

AND WHAT'S WITH THAT STUPID ***GRIN*** ON YOUR FACE...?

Oh, YOU'LL FIND OUT, CHIEF. ***BANK*** ON IT. *HA-HA.*

SUNDAY.

PEERING FROM THE DANK SHADOWS OF A RUNDOWN SHED, THE HIDDEN GUEST EAVES-DROPS ON THE MORNING'S EVENTS.

BOYS! BOYS!! WHERE ARE YOU? IT'S TIME FOR CHURCH.

RIGHT HERE, PA.

OH, DID I KEEP YOU WAITING? SORRY. YOU KNOW HOW EMBARRASSED I GET WHEN WE'RE LATE. THANK YOU FOR BEING READY.

YOU'RE WELCOME.

BY GOD'S OWN DIVINE HAND SHALL HE PROTECT HIS ONLY SON, JESUS, WHO IN TURN SHALL USE HIS HAND TO PROTECT ALL OTHERS THAT FOLLOW THE PATH OF THE LORD.

IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY-- AMEN.

AMEN.

THANKS AGAIN FOR WIPING OUT THAT SPEEDING TICKET, JOE. IT WOULD HAVE REALLY KILLED MY INSURANCE RATES.

MY PLEASURE.

I SEE YOUR BOYS HAVE BEEN PLAYING SOME MORE TACKLE FOOTBALL! YOU TWO OUGHTTA BE A LITTLE EASIER ON EACH OTHER.

YES, MA'AM.

AW, YOU KNOW HOW BOYS ARE. THE TOUGHER THE GAME, THE HARDER THEY PLAY. BUT THEY SURE ARE GROWING UP TO BE FINE YOUNG GENTLEMEN. I'M SO PROUD OF THEM BOTH.

THEIR MOM WOULD'VE BEEN, TOO.

THAT SAME DAY...

wha...?

ANDY, BE A GOOD LAD AND FETCH ME THAT *LAST* BEER.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WATCH THIS BORING GOLF?

SHUDDUP.

"YOU BE CAREFUL IN THERE, BOY. MAKE SURE YOU DON'T...

"...*SPILL* ANY.

WHAT WAS THAT NOISE?!

YOU IDIOT! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!!

I TOLD YOU-- THAT WAS MY *LAST* BEER!

I'M SORRY, PA.

THAT'S IT! I'M THROUGH TRYING TO *BEAT* SOME SENSE INTO YOU!

TIME YOU LEARNED *ANOTHER* LESSON...

...LIKE *DYING!*

P-PA!

STOP IT! STOP IT!

Uh?

READY, BOY?

CLICK!

HAHAHAAA

NOW YOU TWO GET TO BED-- AND THINK ABOUT WHAT WHAT COULD *REALLY* HAPPEN NEXT TIME.

I'M GOING OUT TO THE PUB.

HA HA HA HA

Gasp!

HE'S GETTING WORSE, EDDIE.

I- I COULDN'T *BREATHE*. HE WANTED TO *KILL* ME.

I KNOW. I KNOW.

HE'S COMPLETELY MESSED UP. BUT IT'S *YOU* I'M WORRIED ABOUT. I CAN'T *LET* HIM KEEP *DOING* THIS TO YOU.

HE'S REALLY STARTING TO SCARE ME. WHY DOES HE *DO* IT?

NO CLUE, LITTLE BUDDY. BUT GOD HELP US.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED HERE?

N-NOTHING! HE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!

WHO DIDN'T? YOUR DAD? THAT SCUM-BAG. WHERE'D HE GO?!

PLEASE, MR. SPAWN.

IT'LL ONLY MAKE THINGS WORSE.

NO!

WANDA, WHAT IS IT?

IT'S HIM.

WHO?

SPAWN.

I KEEP SEEING IT OVER AND OVER -- HIM TEARING THOSE MEN APART. BLOOD EVERY-WHERE.

C'MON, SWEETIE, IT'S JUST A DREAM. YOU'LL BE OKAY IN A MINUTE.

I'M SORRY, TERRY. HE JUST SEEMS LIKE SOME KIND OF MONSTER. THERE'S NOTHING HUMAN ABOUT HIM.

"NOTHING AT ALL."

IT'S OKAY. I'M NOT LEAVING. BUT THINGS WILL GET BETTER.

I PROMISE.

BAR

SEE YA AROUND, JOE.

WHAT A GREAT GUY-- ALWAYS THERE FOR HIS FRIENDS.

GLUG GLUG

Huh? NOW WHAT?

C'MERE, JOE.

I'D KNOCK YOUR **BLOCK** OFF IF I THOUGHT IT'D DO ANY GOOD.

SEE, I'VE GOT THIS THING AGAINST HITTING PEOPLE FOR NO GOOD REASON. THROWING PUNCHES IS A REALLY STUPID HOBBY.

IF YOU GET INTO THE HABIT, YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF HITTING SOMEONE YOU **LOVE**, LIKE **I** DID, AND **REGRETTING** IT **FOREVER**.

IT'S NOT WORTH IT.

YOU'VE GOT A GREAT COUPLE OF KIDS THERE, AND **THEY NEED A FATHER**. IT'S TIME YOU STARTED **ACTING** LIKE ONE. A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE **GOOD** FEELINGS ABOUT YOU, JOE... IT'S TIME THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT ONES FELT THE **SAME WAY**. END OF SERMON.

NOW, I WANT TO LEAVE A LITTLE **REMINDER** FOR YOU-- A MESSAGE FOR EVERYONE WHO TALKS ABOUT WHAT A "GREAT GUY" YOU ARE.

I'LL *KILL* YOU!

"JOE, YOU'RE NOT LISTENING. BESIDES, YOU CAN'T KILL WHAT'S ALREADY DEAD.

"NOW HOLD STILL! THIS **WON'T** HURT... **UNFORTUNATELY.**

IF YOU'RE GOOD, IT'LL FADE IN A MONTH.

*SATISFIED THAT HIS MESSAGE HAS BEEN RECEIVED, SPAWN HEADS OUT OF TOWN. IT'S TIME HE GOT BACK TO **HIS** HOME... HIS **ALLEYS**.*

Oh, KNOW WHAT *ELSE* I HEARD? THAT BETH VAISANEN HAS A *CRUSH* ON YOU! AND SHE WANTS TO DO SOME *KISSY-FACE* WITH YOU.

SHE DOES *NOT!*

DOES *SO!*

DOES *NOT!*

?

MY WAGON.

AND YOUR FAVORITE *SHIRT*, EDDIE!

I BEAT MY KIDS

HI, FELLAS.

HOW WAS SCHOOL TODAY?

IT BEGINS.

AGAIN.

GET OFF HIM NOW! I MEAN IT!

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE I TOLD YOU-- THAT THING'S NOT A TOY!

I KNOW.

BLAM

ISSUE 30

I CAN HEAR THE DEVIL LAUGHING AT ME.

I'VE BEEN **AWAKE** AND **WALKING** FOR EIGHT DAYS STRAIGHT. HAVEN'T SEEN ANOTHER SOUL IN ALL THAT TIME.

I **LIKE** IT THAT WAY.

MY **COSTUME** IS THROBBING. IT'S **ANGRY**. IT WANTS TO TELEPORT US BACK TO NEW YORK-- BACK **HOME**.

I DON'T WANT TO USE UP THAT MUCH ENERGY.

I THINK ABOUT THOSE **KIDS** IN ALABAMA... AND THEIR **DAD**. I MIGHT'VE OVERDONE IT, PLAYING WITH THEIR LIVES THAT WAY... PLAYING GOD, ALMOST... BUT THAT GUY NEEDED TO BE TOLD OFF AND I'M **SURE** HE GOT THE MESSAGE.*

AND I CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT **WOMEN**.

WANDA...

ANGELA...

* NOT QUITE. SEE LAST ISSUE-- Tom.

6:9:9:7

WANDA... I BARGAINED MY SOUL TO GET YOU BACK, BUT WHAT THANKS DID I GET FOR SAVING YOUR LIFE? YOU **PULLED AWAY!** YOU SAID I "**SCARE**" YOU!

WAS I SUPPOSED TO BE **GENTLE** WITH THOSE CREEPS WHO ATTACKED YOU?

THEN **ANGELA** CATCHES ME IN THE DARK... ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER...!

SHE CAME ON TO **ME**, WANDA! NO ONE EVER WARNED ME ABOUT **ANGELS.**

BUT SOME ANGEL DUMPED ME SOMEHOW IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE COUNTY, ALABAMA.* SEE YA AROUND, SOLDIER. SO I WALKED.

IN A MONTH I'VE WALKED NEARLY A **THOUSAND MILES**, AND EVERY TOWN'S THE SAME.

PEOPLE ARE THE SAME.

LIKE THE CARS THAT GO BY-- DIFFERENT SHAPES, DIFFERENT COLORS. SAME **NOISE.**

* ANGELA MINI-SERIES, ISSUE 3-- Tom.

WHAT'S THIS NOW-- BOY'S NIGHT OUT? CARRYING TORCHES TO LIGHT THE WAY? MUST BE FRIDAY. PROBABLY GONNA BE A **REAL** BARN-BURNER.

WAH-HOOOOOO!

GET IT WHILE IT'S HOT!

ONLY SAW THEM FOR A SECOND, BUT WEREN'T THEY WEARING...? **NAH.** PEOPLE DON'T STILL DO THAT.

GONNA HAVE US A ***RIGHTEOUS*** TIME!

SMOKIN'!

IT'S NOT LIKE **I** MADE THE MOVES ON ANGELA. SHE HAD HER **OWN** IDEAS.

SO THERE IT IS. I CHEATED ON MY OWN WIDOW. heh.

FUNNY, HUH, WANDA. I'VE DONE SO MUCH THINKING ABOUT YOU, I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU REALLY END, AND MY **IMAGINATION** TAKES OVER.

WELL, TOWN'S OVER THE RISE. MAYBE I'LL LOOK IN ON THE PARTY. MIGHT TAKE MY MIND OFF THINGS.

Oh, WANDA. MAYBE IT'S BEST IF I JUST LEAVE HER BE.

STOP IT!

WHOA!! TOO MUCH LIGHT UP AHEAD... A WOMAN SCREAMING. I'D BETTER CHECK THIS OUT.

BRAD! FORGET IT! IT'S NOT WORTH DYING FOR! YOU *HEAR* ME?!

QUICK, BRING THE *HOSE* UP! I'VE GOTTA MAKE A FIRE BREAK BEFORE IT HITS THE *HOUSE!*

HURRY!

IT'S NO *USE!* WE CAN'T FIGHT THIS *OR* THEM. THOSE PEOPLE HAVE COME HERE TO *KILL* US.

IT'S TIME WE JUST *LEFT*-- *FORGOT* ALL THIS-- BEFORE IT'S *TOO LATE.*

LEAVE ME BE, WOMAN!

NO!

STOP THIS MADNESS! WE'VE GOT *NOTHING* LEFT TO FIGHT FOR. LET THEM *HAVE* IT.

NEVER! AIN'T *NO* ONE GOING TO DRIVE ME OFF MY LAND. THIS IS *MINE, Y'HEAR?* I'M NOT LEAVING LIKE THE *OTHERS!*

IT'S TIME SOMEBODY STOOD *UP* FOR THEMSELVES!

THINK OF *US* FOR ONCE! NOT THEM! THEY'LL KILL US!!

NEARLY LOST IN ALL THE COMMO-TION IS THE SOUND OF DRY CORN STALKS SHIFTING.

PA?

THOSE WHITE-TRASH *MAGGOTS!* I SWEAR THEY'LL *PAY* FOR THIS. IF IT'S THE *LAST* THING I DO, *THEY'LL PAY.*

NOT WITH *ME* AROUND, YOU WON'T. I CAN'T *LIVE* LIKE THIS ANYMORE. YOU'VE BECOME *POSSESSED!*

IT LOOKS LIKE YOU FOLKS COULD USE SOME HELP.

JOSH! GIVE ME THE GUN!

MOVE AND I'LL *KILL* YOU!

I'M UNARMED.

GOOD FOR YOU.

I GOT A MESSAGE YOU CAN TAKE BACK TO YOUR CLAN FRIENDS. YOU TELL 'EM TO *BEWARE,* 'CAUSE *I* AIN'T GOIN' *NOWHERE.*

THIS IS *MY* LAND!! I'LL *DIE* PROTECTING IT!

I'M NOT FROM THE KLAN.

THEN WHY DO YOU WEAR A MASK?

WHO *ARE* YOU? WHAT ARE YOU *HIDING?*

MY PAST.

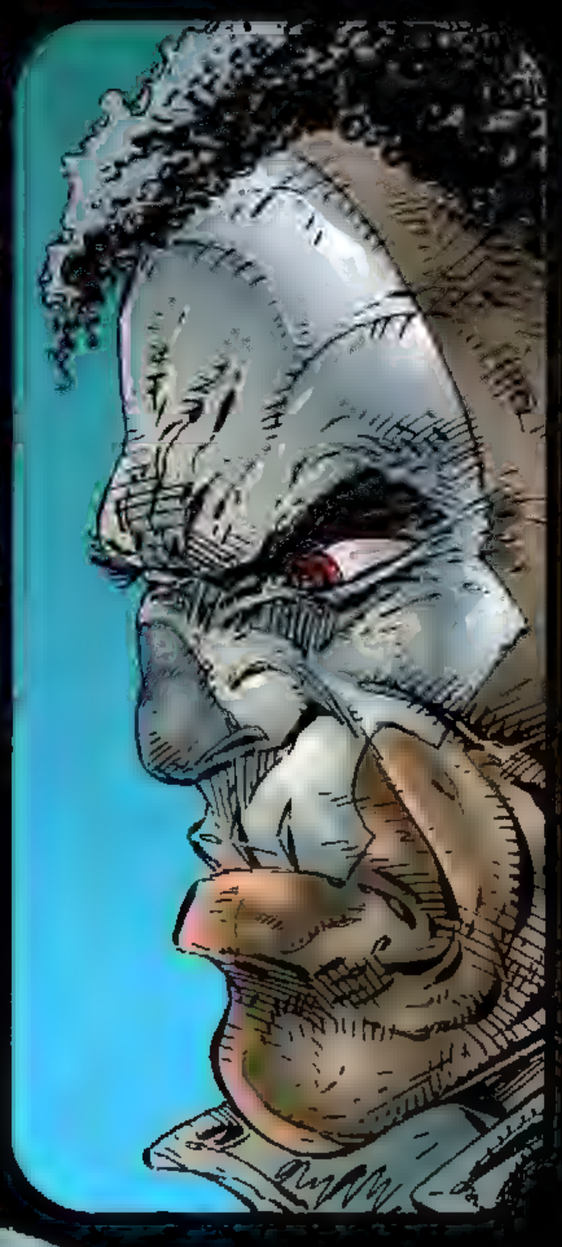
YOU SEE, I'VE DEALT WITH THE WHITE MAN, TOO. THOSE BOYS ARE ALWAYS IN THE POWER POSITIONS, READY TO USE AND ABUSE THE BLACK COMMUNITY. SOMEHOW, WE'RE NEVER GOOD ENOUGH TO DO THE SKILLED WORK, BUT, GOD, HOW THEY LOVE US PICKING UP THEIR GARBAGE.

WHENEVER THE BACKLASH COMES, THEY SHRINK BACK INTO THEIR HOLES, MAKING US AS THE TARGETS FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY. THE SACRIFICIAL LAMBS. THE BLACK SHEEP.

AND WHEN CONFRONTED, THEY GIVE THAT SAME PLASTIC SMILE-- AND TELL US TO BE PATIENT.

THE BEST WE GET IS THE GOVERNMENT QUOTAS-- FORCING THEM TO HIRE MINORITIES FOR BOGUS POSITIONS.

MY FRIEND TERRY BECAME ONE OF THEIR TOKEN BLACKS.



IF WE TRY TO LEAVE, THEY JUST REPLACE US WITH THE NEXT ONE WHO WAS LET INTO THE LINE...

...SOMEONE FAR TOO EAGER TO PLEASE TO EVEN NOTICE THE DANGER SIGNALS.

JEEZ! LOOKIT YOU, YOU'RE SOME KINDA *MONSTER!*

THANKS TO *THEM.*

PUT THAT GUN AWAY AND LET THE MAN TALK, BRAD! CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S SUFFERED *TOO?*

HE DON'T *KNOW* SUFFERIN'! WE GOT THE KLUXERS TRYIN' TA RUN US OFF LAND THAT WAS OWNED BY MY GRAMPA!

AIN'T *NO* WAY SOME CLOWNS IN PILLOWS AN' SHEETS ARE GONNA GET THE ARMSTRONGS OUT! I'LL TAKE THIS TO THE *COURTS* IF I GOTTA! THIS IS AMERICA, DAMMIT!

THOSE MEN AREN'T INTERESTED IN THE LAW. THEY'RE ARMED AND THEY OUTNUMBER YOU. YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO YOUR WIFE. **NO GOOD** CAN COME OF THIS.

THE NEXT NIGHT...

BRETHREN! YOU ALL KNOW WHY WE'RE HERE. IT'S TIME TO FINALLY RID OUR FAIR COUNTY OF THE LAST OF THE HOLD-OUT NEGROS. ONE MORE *CONVINCING* PUSH AND THE ARMSTRONGS SHOULD BE ON THEIR WAY.

LET'S SEE HOW THEY REACT TO A LITTLE *CLEANSING FIRE.*

HALLELUJAH AND *AMEN,* BROTHER!

WE'LL MEET AT JERRY'S BARN IN THREE HOURS. COME PREPARED.

WHILE BEING TRAINED AS A **COMMANDO**, A **NINJA**, AND AN **ASSASSIN**, AL SIMMONS LEARNED TO MAKE DO WITH THE MATERIALS AT HAND.

BWA-SHOOM!

LEAVE THE ARMSTRONG RANCH ALONE!

HANH?

er...

KRAK!

NOW WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!

NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE.

WELL, SOMEHOW HE KNEW ABOUT OUR PLANS TONIGHT. *THAT* SHOULDN'T BE!

WELL, BRING HIM HERE. I WANT TO SEE IF WE SHOT SOME *COLORED* PSYCHO WITH A DEATHWISH-- OR IF WE HAVE A *TRAITOR* IN OUR MIDST.

WHAT'S WRONG, GUYS?

UNG!

GRUNT! THE GUY WEIGHS A TON!

IDIOTS! LET ME JUST SEE HIS FACE.

HKKK! IT'S STUCK! THE FRIGGING THING WON'T *BUDGE!*

FORGET IT! FETCH THE *CHAIN* FROM THE TRUNK. LET'S FINISH THIS PROPERLY.

GREG LOVES SHELLY

T M WK

JOHNNY. PETER. GET HIM DOWN FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.

I DON'T WANT THE EVIDENCE HANGING AROUND TOO LONG.

NEW YORK CITY.

PERFECT!

JUST PERFECT! I GAVE MYSELF A BLEEDING ULCER TRYING TO BUILD A CASE AGAINST BILLY KINCAID...

SPK SPK SPK

... AND WHAT HAPPENS...? SOME COSTUMED FREAK LEAVES HIM IN MY *OFFICE*... *DEAD*, *NAKED*, AND SWADDLED IN *CHAINS*.

COVER MY BUTT, TWITCH!

YES, SIR.

BLAM BLAM BLAM

BLAM BLAM

SO *NOW* I FIND THAT CHIEF BANKS HIRED THE KID KILLER *HIMSELF*.*

IF THAT FILE *SPAWN* GAVE US IS TO BE BELIEVED, THE CHIEF'S CAREER IS *FINISHED*.

PUFF

PUFF

SPEAKING OF WHICH... THINK YOU CAN FINISH *THIS*...?

*ISSUE 27 -- Tom

DONE, SIR.

SPK

Y'KNOW, TWITCH, FOR A PENCIL-NECKED GEEK YOU SHOW GREAT PROMISE AS A SNIPER.

THANKS, SIR. I'LL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT.

*WHILE DETECTIVES BURKE AND WILLIAMS SEARCH FOR A WAY TO EXPOSE THEIR SUPERIOR'S **BRAD ARMSTRONG** IS MAKING A SICKENING DISCOVERY...*

DEAR GOD--NOT YOU, TOO?!

DAMN THOSE MURDERERS!

YOU CALLED?

DROP THE GUN, ARMSTRONG, OR I'LL GIVE YOU A THIRD EYE THE SIZE OF A GRAPEFRUIT.

YOU MEAN WATERMELON.

HAR-HAR. GOOD ONE.

I'LL KILL YOU!

TELL US ANOTHER ONE, YOU BLACK-FACED MONKEY. IF YOU HAD ANY BRAINS YOU'D'VE MOVED MONTHS AGO--

--AND TAKEN YOUR MUTANT ***SON*** AND SLUT ***WIFE WITH*** YOU.

THAT SHOULD KEEP HIS LIGHTS OUT FOR A WHILE.

C'MON. LET'S GET THE BODY DOWN BEFORE...

GlAukk=

JOHNNY?

DEAR GOD ABOVE.

EASY, MISTER ARMSTRONG.

SO, AS YOU CAN SEE, YOUR HONOR, THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO EVIDENCE TO CORROBORATE Mr. ARMSTRONG'S ACCUSATIONS. ON THE CONTRARY, A HANDFUL OF MY CLIENTS WERE INJURED AT THE SITE, DUE TO OBSTACLES STRUNG ACROSS THE ROAD. ONE TRUCK WAS RENDERED COMPLETELY USELESS, WHILE THE OTHER HAS EXTENSIVE DAMAGE, AS YOU CAN SEE IN THE PHOTOS.

ADDITIONALLY, TWO OF THEIR ASSOCIATES HAVE DISAPPEARED FROM THIS SO-CALLED MURDER SITE.

SHALL I CONTINUE?

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY.

... UNLESS MISTER ARMSTRONG HAS SOMETHING ***SUB***STANTIVE TO ADD...?

THIS IS A SHAM.

HEE HEE... *Gulp*

PLEASE EXCUSE MY CLIENT, JUDGE MISSEN.

NEXT TIME YOU TRY AND WASTE MY TIME WITH FALSE AND DEFAMING LAWSUITS...

...I ***HIGHLY*** ENCOURAGE YOU TO HAVE SOME ***EVIDENCE*** AT HAND. MURDER IS A VERY SERIOUS CHARGE. MORE TO THE POINT, MURDER IMPLIES A ***BODY.***

NOW GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I FIND YOU IN CONTEMPT.

THIS TOWN MAKES ME SICK.

SOON! *VERY SOON,* BROTHERS!

I PROMISE THAT ARMSTRONG ***WILL*** PAY FOR WHAT'S HAPPENED TO US. ***NO ONE*** ATTACKS THE KLAN WITHOUT FEELING REPERCUSSIONS!

THE PATH IS NOW CLEAR FOR US TO ELIMINATE ARMSTRONG, AS SCHEDULED! AT MIDNIGHT ON THURSDAY, WE'LL TAKE OUR REVENGE!

BOY, IS THE JUDGE EVER FIRED UP TONIGHT!

AS THE DEADLINE DRAWS NEAR, THE KLAN MEMBERS GO ABOUT THEIR DAILY ROUTINES.

MARKING TIME, THEY SUBMERGE THEMSELVES IN THEIR PARTICULAR PASSIONS.

THEY'LL SOON KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HAVE THAT PRIMARY FOCUS TAKEN AWAY.

XX

GASOLINE

MICHAEL BALT CLEANS AND CARESSES HIS WEBLEY-FOSBERRY .455 AUTOMATIC REVOLVER TWICE A DAY. HE TREATS IT LIKE A MUCH-LOVED MISTRESS.

IT COST HIM OVER FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS. HIS DEVOTION IS A TOUCHING THING TO BEHOLD.

WHEN HE WAKES FROM HIS EVENING NAP, IT WILL BE A FULL TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE THE TEARS STOP.

IT TOOK HIM NEARLY TWO YEARS OF SAVING TO MAKE THE DOWN PAYMENT, BUT IT WAS WORTH THE WAIT.

RAY CRABTREE, Jr., IS NOW THE PROUD OWNER OF THE MOST POWERFUL 4-BY-4 IN THE COUNTY.

TODAY HE PLANS ON PUTTING HIS NEW TREASURE THROUGH ITS PACES.

YEE HAH!

KRAK!!

uh?

AFTER TODAY, HIS FRIENDS WILL TORMENT HIM WITH THE NEW NICK-NAME "2-BY-2."

AND IN JUDGE ZACHERY MISSENS' CHAMBERS...

I'VE BEEN WAITING, JUDGE.

TIME WE HAD A MEETING OF THE MINDS. THURSDAY. JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT. AT THE ARMSTRONG RANCH. COME ALONE.

I DON'T CARE WHAT'S HAPPENED TO EVERYONE ELSE! GIVE ME A TEN MINUTE HEAD START -- THEN SEND IN THE *CAVALRY.*

BY THE TIME THURSDAY ARRIVES, PARANOIA HAS GRIPPED THE ENTIRE CLOAKED CONGREGATION.

A BLOOD LUST HAS SUPPLANTED RATIONAL THOUGHT.

WHERE ARE YOU, SPOOK? SHOW YOURSELF!!

KRACK

SOME-THING FALLS, BEHIND HIM.

KSHK!

Wha...?

BRTT

BRTT

I KNOW IT'S YOU, ARMSTRONG! QUIT PRETENDING TO BE YOUR DEAD FRIEND.

IT WON'T SAVE YOU!

BRTT

WHO'S PRETENDING?

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

MORE THAN YOU CAN GIVE, REDNECK.

Y'SEE, I KNOW YOUR KIND. THERE'S NOTHING THAT WOULD HAVE EVEN A **REMOTE** CHANCE OF SINKING INTO THAT RACIST BRAIN OF YOURS...

...EXCEPT **ONE** THING:

FEAR.

YOU KNOW, THAT LITTLE EMOTION **YOU** USE TO MAKE PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR HOMES.

THEIR FAMILIES.

BUT THAT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU, **DOES** IT, JUDGE.

WELL, **HERE'S** SOMETHING THAT **MIGHT.**

YOUR LIFE. I CAN **EASILY** SNUFF IT OUT. LUCKY FOR **YOU...**

?

OH. YOUR **BOYS** HAVE FINALLY ARRIVED.

THAT'S RIGHT, **FOOL!** AND THAT MEANS YOU'RE A ***DEAD MAN!*** YOU MUST HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT MY ***FRIENDS.***

THEN LET'S JUST SEE HOW **WELL** YOUR **"FRIENDS"** **KNOW** YOU.

RAYS OF GREENISH LIGHT FLASH INTENSELY FOR THREE SECONDS.

*LOST IN THE COMMOTION OF SHOUTED ORDERS AND SCREECHING TIRES IS A SINGLE UNHEARD **SCREAM.***

*IN A FEW MOMENTS, THEY WILL FIND ONLY **ONE** PERSON INSIDE.*

*THE **OTHER** HAS VANISHED LIKE A **GHOST.***

JUDGE! IT'S US!

OVER THERE! I SEE SOME-THING.

IT'S THE LEADER! YOU OKAY, SIR?

WHAT?!

IT'S A FRIGGIN' *COLORED!*

HOW DARE YOU DESECRATE THE SACRED ROBE?! *NO* DARKIE IS WORTHY OF ITS TOUCH!

HOW DARE YOU *MESS* WITH US?!

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?!

BILL! *GARY!!* WHAT ARE YA *DOING?!*

IT'S ME, *MISSEN!*

PUT ME DOWN!

I SAID *STOP IT!!*

THE OUTRAGED KLANSMEN PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE INTER-LOPER'S FRIGHTENED APPEALS-- EVEN THOUGH HE COULDN'T POSSIBLY KNOW WHO THEY ARE BEHIND THEIR MASKS. THEY VICIOUSLY PISTOL-WHIP HIM, SILENCING ANY FURTHER PROTEST.

SOMEWHERE NOT FAR AWAY...

AFTER YOUR COURT CASE I COULD SEE YOU WERE JUST GOING TO GET SCREWED, SO I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF EAVESDROPPING ON THEIR MEETING. I KNEW JUDGE MISSEN WOULDN'T BE BRAVE ENOUGH TO MEET ME ALONE.

SO I TURNED UP THE HEAT A LITTLE.

BUT YOU'LL NEED **MORE** THAN THAT, BRAD.

HERE'S A FILE CONTAINING DETAILED DOCUMENTS. THEY SHOW HOW LAND WAS ILLEGALLY PROCURED THROUGH EXTORTION AND FORCE. THE JUDGE KEPT PRETTY EXTENSIVE NOTES.

HIS MISTAKE.

NO BODY OF GOVERNMENT OUTSIDE THIS COUNTY WILL DISREGARD THESE FACTS.

WITH THESE IN THE HANDS OF THE STATE JUDICIARY, YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BEING RUN OFF YOUR LAND. YOUR FRIENDS WILL GET BACK WHAT'S RIGHTFULLY THEIRS.

OUR PEOPLE WILL RETURN.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, STRANGER...

THANK YOU.

DON'T KNOW ***HOW*** YOU ***SURVIVED,*** BUT GOD SURELY DOES MOVE IN ***MYSTERIOUS*** WAYS.

I HOPE THE ***JUDGE*** DON'T CAUSE NO MORE PROBLEMS.

I THINK HE GOT THE MESSAGE.

KLIKITY-K

HE SITS ALONE. SWALLOWED WHOLE BY THE DARKNESS.

HIS ALLOTTED SPACE FAR EXCEEDS THAT OF THE OTHER, NAMELESS, OCCUPANTS.

LAK-KLAK

TO THE MONOTONOUS RHYTHM OF WHEELS GLIDING OVER STEEL TRACKS, HE THINKS.

PLAYING THE SAME THOUGHT OVER.

AND OVER.

KLAK-KLI

HER FEAR AND REJECTION, LIKE THE FLASHES OF LIGHT THAT SNEAK BETWEEN THE CRACKS, STAB AT HIM.

iTY-KLAK

HE THINKS ABOUT IT AGAIN.

ANOTHER STAB.

HE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO QUICK TO ACT, HE TELLS HIMSELF.

KLAK-KLA

BUT HE WAS MAD. EVERY-THING AROUND HAD BECOME A CHALLENGE.

K-KLIKIT

HE KNOWS THAT ANSWER NOW: FEAR AND REJECTION.

-KLAK-KL

SO HE BLINKS--A CUE TO CHANGE THE CHANNEL. THINK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

HOME.

IT MUST BE NEAR. THE **COSTUME** TELLS HIM SO.

K-KLAK

THE COSTUME--ACTUALLY A SYMBIONT **LIFE-FORM**--HAS BEEN WITH HIM THROUGH A LOT. IT'S RARELY WRONG.

WHAT HARM IN FACING ANOTHER?

THE MECHANICAL HEARTBEAT BEGINS TO SLOW AS THE STEEL BEAST CREEPS INTO THE STATION.

HIS COSTUME GOES LIMP.

THIS IS SPAWN'S STOP.

THE TIME FOR BANDING TOGETHER NOW ENDED, EACH BEGINS WHAT HE HOPES WILL BE A NEW LIFE.

A NEW PATH.

ONE OCCUPANT CHOOSES A PATH NO OTHER CAN FOLLOW.

EVEN BEFORE IT'S STOPPED, SEA F HOMELESS HUMANITY SPEWS QUICKLY FROM THE BOX CAR. THEIR JOURNEY IS ALMOST OVER. THE PROMISED LAND IS BUT A FEW MILES AWAY.

THIS FEELS GOOD.

A CITY ONCE HATED HAS NOW BECOME HIS HAVEN.

FILLED WITH AN ANXIETY HE DIDN'T EXPECT, SPAWN BREAKS INTO A SPRINT.

MORESO, HE WANTS THEM.

FINALLY ENGULFED IN THE BLACK BOSOM OF THE BECKONING SHADOWS, HE PAUSES.

THE FAMILIAR DARKNESS BLANKETS HIM WITH COMFORT.

THE KING HAS RETURNED.

ADRENALIN PUMPS HARDER.

C'MON, BOOTSY, GET A GRIP. FOR THE LAST THREE WEEKS YOU'VE DRAGGED ME HERE TO LOOK AT YOUR FRIGGIN' *FOOTWEAR*.

BUT I *MISS* THEM.

HE NEEDS HIS ALLEYS.

LOOK! YOU PUT 'EM THERE YOURSELF. MADE A BIG PRODUCTION OUT OF IT TOO, REMEMBER? NOW *LIVE* WITH IT.

Aw, *C'MON*, BOBBY. YOU DON'T JUST LIVE WITH THINGS FOR TWENTY YEARS, THEN FORGET ABOUT THEM. I NEED TO WEAN MYSELF SLOWLY.

JUST KEEP REMINDING YOURSELF *WHY* THEY'RE UP THERE.

YEAH, I KNOW. HE DID MORE FOR US THAN I COULD EVER HOPE TO REPAY.

I MISS AL, TOO.

BUT I AIN'T GOING TO STAND AROUND ALL NIGHT BABY-SITTING. SO WAKE ME WHEN YOU COME TO YOUR SENSES.

AL! WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU *BEEN?!* WE THOUGHT YOU WERE... YOU KNOW... GONE.

NOT A CHANCE. I'D MISS YOU GUYS TOO MUCH.

BOO!

AHHG!

HOLY...!

MAN, I THOUGHT FOR SURE SOMEONE HAD GOTTEN TO YOU. WITH ALL THE CRAZIES THAT'VE COME THROUGH HERE, WELL, AFTER TEN DAYS WE DIDN'T HOLD MUCH HOPE.

EVEN HAD A MEMORIAL AND STUFF.

I'M GLAD WE WERE WRONG.

THOUGH NOW THAT YOU'RE BACK, THERE'S NO POINT IN LEAVING MY BOOTS HERE.

'LEAST THEY GOT AIRED OUT.

NOT FAR AWAY...

ORBITAL STATION ONE. THIS IS TERRAN HEAD-QUARTERS.

ACKNOWLEGED

GENTLEMEN, LET THIS SERVE AS A FORMAL INTRO-DUCTION. I AM ***RAFAEL***. I AM TAKING OVER FOR GABRIELLE, WHO HAS BEEN REMOVED AS COMMAN-DER OF TERRAN AFFAIRS.*

THE EMBARRASSING DEBACLE OF HER DEALING WITH THE CURRENT 'SPAWN'-- AND HER PERSONAL GRUDGE AGAINST A FELLOW ANGEL-- CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE WHICH SHALL NOT BE REPEATED DURING MY TENURE.

I WILL RUN THIS OFFICE WITH FAR GREATER EFFICIENCY THAN YOU MAY BE ACCUSTOMED TO--AND WILL NOT TOLERATE FAILURE ON ANY LEVEL. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?

*AS PER *ANGELA* #3 -- Tom.

AFFIRMATIVE.

GOOD.

GIVE ME A STATUS REPORT ON YOUR CURRENT TERRAN READINGS.

AT PRESENT WE HAVE THREE SIGNALS EMINATING FROM EARTH.

THREE! ARE YOU SURE?

WE'VE RE-CONFIRMED A NUMBER OF TIMES THE READINGS ARE CORRECT

TWO OF THE SIGNALS THOUGH ARE WEAK

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT, THEN-- A *PARTIAL* DERIVATIVE? OR AN ENTIRELY NEW ENTITY?

ANALYSIS STILL INCONCLUSIVE... BUT ALL THREE READINGS OCCUR IN THE SAME FIVE-BLOCK RADIUS. THE AREA IS KNOWN LOCALLY AS "THE BOWERY," IN NEW YORK CITY.

YOU MEAN THEY'RE *ALL* IN MY BACK YARD?

IT APPEARS SO. THE TWO WEAKER SIGNALS ARE MOBILE SENTIENT BEINGS, INCIDENTALLY.

THIS IS *UNHEARD OF!* IT'S BEEN SPECULATED THAT A POWER TRANSFERENCE *MAY* BE POSSIBLE, BUT WE'VE *KNOWN* THE CHARACTER OF EACH SPAWN. *NONE* HAS EVER WILLINGLY RELEASED POWER TO ANOTHER.

THIS MAY PUT OUR PRIME TARGET IN A VULNERABLE POSITION. HAVE YOU CHOSEN A NEW VESSEL?

AFFIRMATIVE. THIS SOLDIER WILL BE TAILORED TO OUR CURRENT DATA.

TESTS FOLLOWING OUR OTHER ATTEMPT INDICATE THAT THE ELEMENTAL FIRE CONTENT WAS ACCURATE, BUT INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE SUBJECT.

*WE HAVE SINCE DECOMMISSIONED THAT FIRST SOLDIER. **

WE CONCLUDE THAT OUR NEXT SUBJECT MUST WILLINGLY EMBRACE THE VAST POWER OF THE FIRE.

Ah. A SOLDIER WITH A GOOD SOUL. *PERFECT!*

* JASON WYNN, IN ISSUE 16 -- Tom.

C'MON! NO! NOT AGAIN. THIS WON'T HELP ME FIND MY MURDER CONSPIRACY EVIDENCE.

ACCESS DENIED

HAVE TO GIVE JASON WYNN CREDIT-- HE SURE KNOWS HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF HIS INFLUENCE.

HE EITHER COMES UP SQUEAKY CLEAN OR HAS RENDERED THE INFORMATION FROZEN IN THE DATA LINK-UP. SOMEONE'S BUILT A ***HECK*** OF A FORTRESS AROUND HIM.

LET ME TRY SOMETHING ELSE.

UNBELIEVABLE.

HIS ENTIRE FILE DIRECTORY HAS BEEN RECLASSIFIED. MY SECURITY CLEARANCE ISN'T ENOUGH TO EVEN GET ***CLOSE*** TO THIS SECURED DATA. THAT'S NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE.

THE BEST I CAN FIGURE, THOSE RECENT SECURITY CHANGES WERE DIRECTED BY AN OBSOLETE SECTOR. THEY WERE SHUT DOWN MONTHS AGO.

OLD JASON IS HIDING SOMETHING. I DOUBT EVEN THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE COULD GET TO THOSE FILES.

MAYBE IF I REROUTE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL SECTOR F, CATEGORY 12...?

HE'S GOT THE WHOLE SYSTEM WORLDWIDE LOCKED UP!

ACCESS DENIE

DENIED

GOD!

ONLY ONE OPTION LEFT-- UPGRADE MY STATUS... WHICH MEANS A TRANSFER INTO WYNN'S DEPARTMENT.

LIKE I SAID, BEEN REAL QUIET 'ROUND HERE OF LATE. KIND OF BORING AFTER ALL THE EXCITEMENT YOU CREATED. CAN'T SAY I DON'T *MIND* THE QUIET SOMETIMES, BUT IT GIVES PEOPLE A LOT OF EMPTY TIME TO THINK ABOUT THINGS...

GOOD AND BAD.

WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT?

WELL, A LOT OF THE GUYS. THEY'VE BEEN TALKING. JUST STUPID STUFF. YOU KNOW-- DUMB RUMORS. EVEN A LITTLE PARANOIA, IF YOU ASK *ME*. BUT THE TALK HASN'T QUIETED DOWN, AL, NOW YOU'RE BACK. IT'LL GET CRAZY.

I HEARD THE OTHER DAY THAT A BUNCH OF GUYS WANT TO DRIVE YOU *OUTTA* HERE. THINK YOU'RE *NO GOOD*. THEY THINK YOU'VE JUST SUCKED THE *LIFE* OUT OF THEIR TERRITORY.

DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.

BOOTSY AND I, *WE* WANT YOU HERE. YOU GAVE ME MY *LIFE* BACK.* I'LL NEVER *FORGET* THAT-- NEVER *DESERT* YOU. THAT'S WHY IT WAS SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW *YOU* COULD JUST SPLIT AND NOT SAY *ANY*THING.

BUNCH OF **ANGELS** DRAGGED ME TO HEAVEN, THEN DUMPED ME IN THE **DEEP SOUTH.** BEING A SPAWN MAKES ME A PRIME ITEM ON THEIR AGENDA. IT JUST TOOK ME THIS LONG TO GET BACK WITHOUT USING THE LIMITED ENERGY THAT **DEVIL** GAVE ME.

BEING AWAY WAS A CHANCE TO SEE THAT **MY** EXISTENCE ISN'T THE **ONLY** ONE THAT'S OUT OF CONTROL.

"NO ONE SEEMS SAFE FROM CONFLICT. NOT **ANGELS**.

"NOT CHILDREN.

'AND SOME GO TO DRAMATIC LENGTHS TO CREATE THE VIOLENCE."

ISSUE 26 -- Tom.

SO LET WHOEVER YOU RUN INTO KNOW THAT I'M BACK. TELL 'EM TO DEAL WITH THAT FACT.

ANY-WAY, WHERE IS MY GOOD BUDDY, THE CURSE? GOT TIRED OF HANGING AROUND?*

DUNNO. NO ONE DOES. BUT HE'S BEEN MISSING FOR A *WHILE*. MUST'VE BEEN IN A HELLUVA HURRY, THOUGH. DIDN'T EVEN TAKE PART OF HIS *ARM* WITH HIM.

WHAT A MESS, uh?

*FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE -- Tom-

SPEAKING OF WHICH...

...WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOUR *CAPE?* IT DOESN'T SEEM VERY IMPRESSIVE ANY-MORE. I THOUGHT IT PROTECTED YOU OR SOME-THING.

YOU GOT ME, BOOTSY. IT JUST KIND OF **FREAKED OUT** WHILE I WAS IN HEAVEN. I LOST MOST OF IT WHILE **ESCAPING**. IT'S STILL ACTING WEIRD NOW, WEEKS LATER. THE WHOLE **COSTUME'S** BEEN FAR MORE AGGRESSIVE. THE LARGE PIECES OF ITS CAPE THAT WERE TORN AWAY HAVE LEFT IT WEAK AND IN SHOCK.

I'M HOPING IT DOESN'T GET TOO BIZARRE.

"IT HAD BEEN A MIRACLE," HIS MOTHER KEPT TELLING EVERYONE.

21ST STREET MISSION
JESUS SAVES

NO ONE, NOT EVEN HIS PARENTS, EXPECTED SUCH A LIFE CHANGE FROM **PHIL TIMPER**.

CONSTANTLY IN AND OUT OF JUVENILE DETENTION FROM EARLY ON. FINALLY CONVICTED AND INCARCERATED: TWO YEARS FOR FELONY GRAND THEFT.

IT WAS IN PRISON THAT PHIL GAVE HIMSELF COMPLETELY TO THE LORD'S BIDDING.

NOW HE'S THE MODEL CITIZEN, EVEN TRAINING TO BE A MINISTER AT THE LOCAL CHURCH.

AFTER ELEVEN SOLID YEARS SERVING THE LORD, HE STILL PRAYS EVERY NIGHT THAT HE WILL BE WORTHY OF GOD'S KINGDOM WHEN THE TIME COMES.

ORBITAL STATION ONE.

BI-LEVEL SENSORS INDICATE AN EVEN GREATER TOLERANCE FOR PAIN THAN ORIGINALLY PROJECTED.

OUR SOLDIER SHALL BE NEAR PERFECT

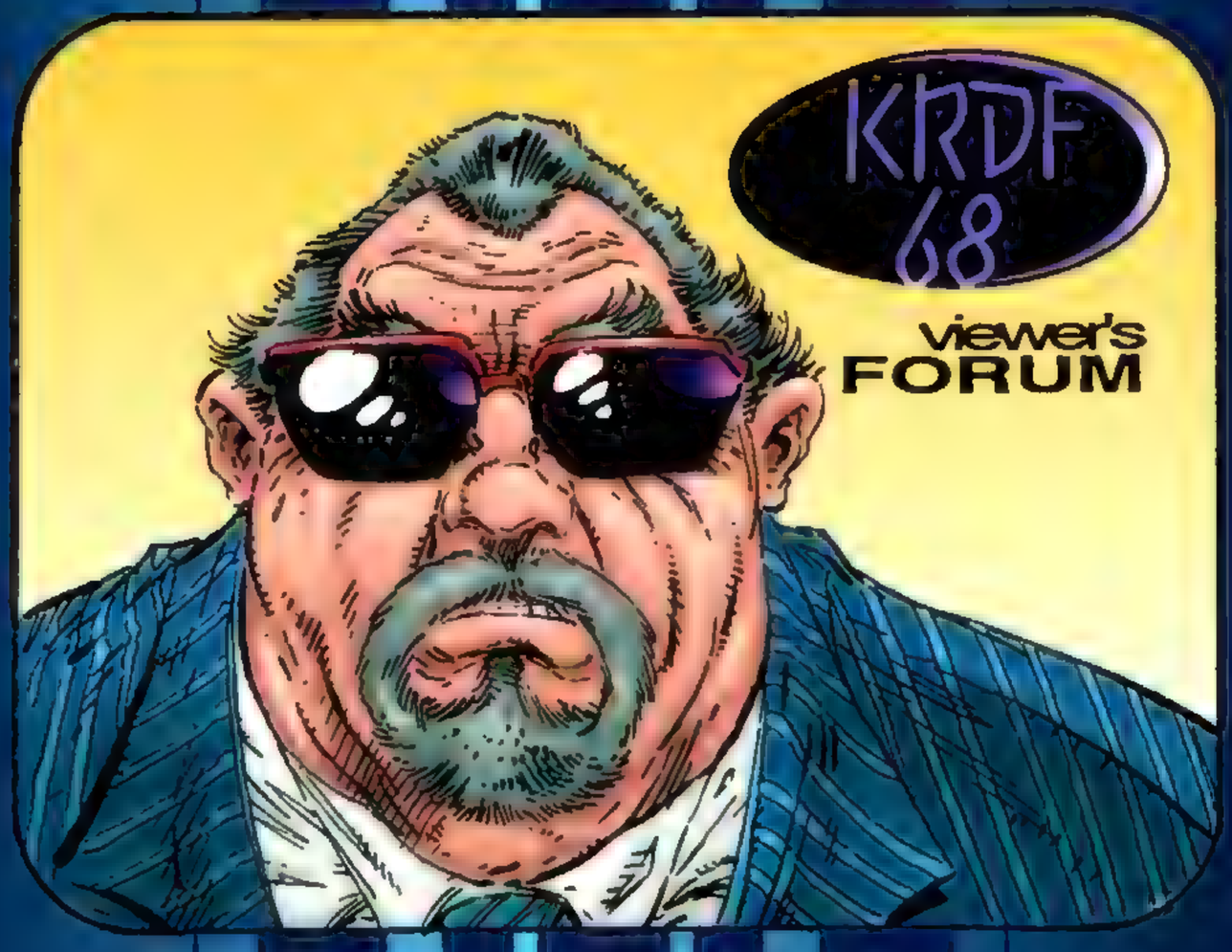
THE COMBINED EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES MAKE HIM INDEED A SUPERIOR VESSEL. IN A FEW MINUTES THE SUBJECT'S BODY COMPOSITION WILL COMPLETE THE INTERNAL TRANS-MUTATION.

ALL THAT OUR REDEEMER YET REQUIRES IS THE FINAL STEP.

NUCLEAR FIRE DIFFUSION

EARLIER TODAY IN NEW YORK CITY'S BOWERY, A "MYSTERIOUS LIGHT" WAS AT THE CENTER OF THE UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCE OF ONE OF THE AREA'S LEADING CITIZENS. PHIL TIMPER HAD WORKED WITH THE HOMELESS THROUGH VARIOUS CHARITIES AND SHELTERS FOR ELEVEN YEARS, AND WAS HONORED LAST YEAR AS "VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR" BY THE CITY'S MAYOR. NUMEROUS EYEWITNESSES TELL ESSENTIALLY THE SAME STORY, CNN HAS LEARNED. THEY CLAIM TIMPER WAS STRUCK BY WHAT APPEARED TO BE LIGHTNING, AND VANISHED. HIS GRATEFUL CLIENTS SCOURED THE AREA IN VAIN. TIMPER IS OFFICIALLY LISTED AS MISSING, BUT SOME HAVE EXPRESED DOUBT THAT HE COULD HAVE SURVIVED THE EXPERIENCE.

NEW YORK'S FINEST ARE STILL AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A PROMINENT GOOD SAMARITAN AT THAT BOWERY CHARITY MISSION EARLIER TODAY. A SOURCE AT THE POLICE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE REVEALED THAT THE INVESTIGATION MAY INCLUDE THE CAPED VIGILANTE KNOWN AS SPAWN. THIS ELUSIVE MASKED FIGURE HAS BEEN A FIXTURE IN THE BOWERY SINCE HIS ARRIVAL SOME MONTHS AGO, AND HAS CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN HIS SHARE OF FUSS AND COMMOTION TO THE SCENE. OUR CRIMSON AVENGER'S RECENT EXTENDED, UNEXPLAINED ABSENCE HAS LEFT THE SHABBY LITTLE DISTRICT MUCH AS HE FOUND IT: DREARIER AND QUIETER THAN ANY RIGHT-THINKING PART OF MANHATTAN SHOULD EVER BE.



NOW, ***BAM!***- OUT OF LEFT FIELD COMES ANOTHER NEW YORK MOMENT AS A MODEL CITIZEN ***VANISHES*** FROM THE MIDDLE OF A SOUP KITCHEN. THIS IS THE SAME WELL-SCRUBBED CITIZEN WHO WAS SHOWERED WITH GOLDEN HYPE DURING OUR PREVIOUS MAYOR'S FAILED REELECTION BID. COULD THE SORE LOSER HAVE CALLED IN ONE LAST FAVOR FROM ON HIGH AND HAD THE POOR LAD ***SACRIFIED*** ON THE ALTAR OF ***UNWELCOME AMBITION?*** THE BOYS IN BLUE, MEANWHILE, HAVE GIVEN THIS CASE THE SAME CARE AND ATTENTION THEY WOULD A STOLEN CAR RADIO IN TIMES SQUARE. JUST GOES TO SHOW HOW SINCERE OUR POLITICIANS ARE ABOUT THEIR COMMITTMENT TO THE LITTLE GUY. PICK OUT AN "AW-SHUCKS" SOCIAL WORKER, GIVE 'IM A TROPHY AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, THEN LET HIM GO ROT. GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!

AN N.Y.P.D. GYMNASIUM...

GOODNESS, SIR. I'VE NEVER ***SEEN*** THAT MANY DIGITS ON A SCALE BEFORE.

IT'S EVEN GONE UP SINCE THE ***LAST*** TIME. HARD TO UNDERSTAND, ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU'VE CUT BACK TO ONLY A ***DOZEN*** DOUGHNUTS A DAY.

NOT EVEN ***THIS*** COULD RUIN TODAY.

A LITTLE ***PERKY,*** ARE WE? THIS WOULDN'T BY CHANCE HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH CHIEF BANKS, SIR?

LET'S JUST SAY THAT ***RIGHT*** NOW OUR GOOD FRIEND IS RECEIVING A TINY PACKAGE.

"AND I DON'T THINK IT'S GOING TO ***BRIGHTEN*** UP HIS DAY."

ROSES ARE RED,
VIOLETS ARE BLUE,
NOW THAT KINCAID
IS GONE,
THE TRAIL LEADS
BACK TO YOU

DAMN.

THIS IS BANKS. GET ME WYNN. ***NOW!***

AT 4:00 a.m., THE BOWERY'S BACKSTREETS FINALLY DRAG TO A HALT. EACH OF THE ALLEY'S OCCUPANTS HAS SOUGHT OUT HIS PLACE OF REST. A CAREFUL PECKING ORDER UNDERLIES THE COZY JUMBLE.

IT IS ONE OF THE SHORT PERIODS WHEN IT'S SAFE TO REST.

ESPECIALLY TONIGHT. WORD SPREAD QUICKLY OF THEIR KING'S RETURN. NOW THEY CAN SLEEP LIKE BABIES. AND LIKE A PROUD FATHER HE STANDS IN THE SHADOWS AND LOOKS DOWN ON THEM, HIS CHILDREN.

"THE MOMENT FEELS SO NATURAL," THE CREATURE CALLED SPAWN THINKS.

AS HE LISTENS TO THEIR MUFFLED BREATHING, A SUDDEN SENSATION GRIPS HIM.

HIS CHAINS PULL TOWARD SOME UNKNOWN DESTINATION.

"Danger," THE COSTUME IS TELLING ITS HOST.

HE SPRINTS THREE CITY BLOCKS BEFORE ROUNDING THE LAST CORNER -- THEN STOPS DEAD IN HIS TRACKS.

HE CURSES THE TWISTED EXISTENCE THAT'S NOW HIS...

... AND CURSES THE FAMILIAR FIGURE BEFORE HIM.

...THEREFORE YOUR SIGNAL RADIATES THE MOST WEAKLY OF THE THREE. A NECRO-PLASM TRANSFERRAL FROM A HELLSPAWN IS THE PROBABLE SOURCE.

TRUE.

BUT YOUR NEWFOUND LIFE HAS MADE YOU A RECEPTACLE FOR A RESIDUAL AURA YOU'D HAVE NO WAY OF PERCEIVING.

YOU POSE NO THREAT. YOU ARE, HOW-EVER, THE FIRST SUCH CASE TO BE DOCU-MENTED.

ORBITAL STATION ONE, ACKNOWLEDGE. SENTIENT BEING LOCATED. PERMISSION TO RETURN TO BASE.

AFFIRMATIVE REDEEMER. LOCATOR READINGS CONFIRM ANALYSIS OF SOURCE

THE SCENE IS BEGINNING TO PLAY LIKE A BAD SCI-FI MOVIE.

WHAT'RE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT?! YOU CRAZY *PUNK!* **I'M** NOT SPAWN!

I'M GOING TO ASK JUST ONCE. BACK AWAY FROM HIM. NICE AND SLOW LIKE.

THIS IS BETWEEN YOU AND ME, ANTI-SPAWN.

THE NAME IS *REDEEMER.*

MY MISSION IS WITH *THIS* SUBJECT, NOT YOU. SO *LEAVE.*

YOUR TIME WILL COME *LATER.*

NOW *THIS* IS INTERESTING.

DAMN YOU! I SAID LEAVE HIM ALONE!

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? YOU MUST BE EVEN MORE IGNORANT OF YOUR HELLSPAWN ABILITIES THAN WE'VE DETERMINED.

YOU DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO STOP ME.

"*LISTEN* TO YOUR COSTUME. IT'S *WEAK*.

"THUS, SO ARE *YOU*."

SPAWN IS TOSSED ASIDE, LIKE A BROKEN RAG DOLL, WITH EACH ASSAULT.

HIS EFFORTS ARE ALMOST EMBARRASSING.

DIRECT ATTACK IS FUTILE. TRICKERY NOW SEEMS TO BE HIS ONLY OPTION.

SPAWN POSITIONS HIMSELF DIRECTLY IN REDEEMER'S LINE OF FIRE, KNOWING THE DAMAGE WILL BE SEVERE, BUT LESS CRIPPLING THAN IT APPEARS.

I SAID, RELEASE HIM!!

UNFORTUNATELY, HIS STRATEGY HAS FAILED. HE NEVER CONSIDERED THAT REDEEMER WOULD TELEPORT, HIS VICTIM IN TOW.

LYING IN A CRUMPLED, EXHAUSTED HEAP, SPAWN AND HIS COSTUME ARE UNABLE TO RECOVER IN TIME TO HELP HIS FRIEND.

MAN, LOOKIT THE SIZE OF THAT *HOLE!*

IT'S OKAY.

THE CURSE GAVE IT TO ME A WHILE BACK.* DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE POWER FIXING IT. THE COSTUME MENDED IT-SELF OVER IT.

I WAS HOPING THE REDEEMER WOULD THINK HE'D DONE ME SOME SERIOUS DAMAGE, AND GIVE ME AN OPENING TO AMBUSH HIM.

* ISSUE 27 -- Tom.

DOES IT HURRK!

HORROR ENGULFS SPAWN AS HIS COSTUME ACTS ON ITS OWN, FLAILING AND SNAPPING UNCONTROLLABLY.

THE COSTUME LASHES ABOUT WILDLY, LIKE A TRAPPED ANIMAL FACING DEATH. .

IT CAN'T RECOGNIZE WHO'S ON MY SIDE!

RUN!

WITH EVERY POSSIBLE OBJECT NOW SHREDDED, THE COSTUME AND ALLEY GO SILENT.
DEATHLY SILENT.

6:9:7:1

THE FIRST HINT OF LIFE COMES HOURS LATER.

IT BEGINS TO MOVE.

TO GROW.

TO BREATHE.

THE COSTUME LIVES.

AGAIN.

NEXT ISSUE: A NEW LOOK

NEW YORK CITY.

IN ANY LIGHT, THIS STRUCTURE IS A TESTAMENT IN STEEL AND GLASS. IT TAKES ON A MONOLITHIC MAGNIFICENCE AT NIGHT.

ITS CLEAN LINES ARE BROKEN WITH JUST THE BAREST OF ADORNMENTS, PLACED TO ACCENTUATE ITS **HEIGHT**. TO THE CASUAL ONLOOKER IT SEEMS TO TOUCH THE HEAVENS.

IN SOME INSTANCES, IT **DOES**.

AT THE MOMENT, THIS SELF-ASSURED FACADE HIDES A MASSIVE REORGANIZATION. THE **PREVIOUS** DIRECTOR OF TERRAN AFFAIRS WAS UNABLE TO DISTINGUISH BUSINESS FROM MISDIRECTED SELF-INTEREST. HER TAINT MUST BE SWEPT AWAY. SUPPLANTED.

THE BUSINESS OF BUSINESS, AFTER ALL, IS BUSINESS. THIS FRANCHISE WISHES THE COMPLETE CONFIDENCE OF ITS "FRONT OFFICE":

HEAVEN ITSELF.

THIS CREATURE'S PRESENCE HERE HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE BUILDING'S DIVINE LANDLORD.

COMPOSED OF **NECRO-PLASM**, THIS NEW WARRIOR OF THE DAMNED COMES BOUND TO A BODY-SHEATHING, RED AND BLACK **NEURAL PARASITE.**

OVER THE CENTURIES, THESE WARRIORS HAVE BEEN NAMED IN HUSHED WHISPERS:

"SPAWN."

MORE APPROPRIATELY, **"HELLSPAWN."**

THEY OCCUR BUT ONCE EACH FOUR HUNDRED YEARS, AND BY THEIR INFREQUENCE ARE RELEGATED TO FABLE AND LEGEND.

EACH OCCURRENCE, THOUGH, SIGNALS THE INEVITABILITY OF AN ULTIMATE, UNHOLY WAR. OUR EARTH IS A CONVENIENT TRAINING GROUND.

THE PENTHOUSE SUITE OF OFFICES COMMANDS A VIEW WHICH SEEMS IMPOSSIBLY FAR-RANGING. WITH HER BACK TO IT ALL, THE NEWLY-APPOINTED DIRECTOR PREPARES FOR A MEETING. A VERY **IMPORTANT** MEETING. HAVING BEEN IN "THE SERVICE" NOW FOR WELL OVER **TWO MILLENNIA**, SHE UNDERSTANDS THE NEED FOR SUCH GET-TOGETHERS.

TODAY'S CONFERENCE IS TO FORMALLY SET THE **GROUND RULES.**

LIKE ANY SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYEE, **RAFAEL** KNOWS ONE'S **APPEARANCE** IS IMPORTANT AT THESE SESSIONS.

HER REPORTS ARE READY, AND THEY SHOW ALL CURRENT ACTIVITIES ARE **CLEAN.** A FEW NEW POLICIES OF HER OWN ARE ALREADY IN EFFECT, AND SHE HOPES **THEY** WILL APPROVE.

MS RAFAEL, THE *DIGNITARIES* ARE HERE.

SEND THEM IN, PLEASE.

SHE'S FEELING **CONFIDENT.**

UPPER MANAGEMENT'S BUSINESS PLAN MUST BE **FULLY** UNDERSTOOD... PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF **GABRIELLE'S** FIASCO.*

* SEEN IN THE *ANGELA* MINI SERIES - Tom.

THOUGH A BIT NERVOUS.

PLEASE! MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE.

MAY I *GET* YOU ANYTHING?

NO. BUT *THANK* YOU FOR *ASKING.*

AS YOU KNOW, WE DON'T HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF *TIME.* THERE ARE *OTHER* MEETINGS. I HOPE YOU *UNDERSTAND?*

OF COURSE.

GOOD. THEN COME *HERE,* MY CHILD. LET ME GET A *LOOK* AT YOU.

MY, BUT ***YOU'RE*** A PRETTY ONE, ***ALSO.*** IT WARMS MY ***HEART*** TO SEE EVERY-ONE TAKE SUCH ***GOOD CARE*** OF THEIR VESSELS.

I APPRECIATE YOUR KIND WORDS.

YOU'RE MOST ***WELCOME.*** WOULD YOU DO ME A ***FAVOR*** TODAY? YOUR MOTHER'S NAME WAS ***MARY.*** I'D REALLY LIKE IT IF YOU'D CALL ***ME*** THAT, TOO.

JUST FOR TODAY.

IT WOULD BE AN HONOR.

I HADN'T THOUGHT OF HER IN SUCH A LONG TIME. THANK YOU FOR REMINDING ME.

NOW, HOW MAY I BE USEFUL, MARY?

YOU ALREADY ***ARE,*** MY DEAR.

BY HAVING YOU WATCH OVER THIS PLANET I HAVE PLACED A ***GREAT*** BURDEN ON YOUR SHOULDERS. YOUR POSITION WILL PUT YOU UNDER EXCEPTIONAL ***PRESSURE.***

I'M ***DIS-APPOINTED*** YOUR PREDECESSOR DIDN'T WORK OUT.

WE CANNOT ***AFFORD*** THOSE KINDS OF ERRORS-- FOR EVIL IS AN ***OBSERVANT*** ADVERSARY, ONE WHO FLOURISHES IN OUR TIMES OF ***WEAKNESS.***

OUR GOAL IS TO ***LISTEN.*** TO ***LEARN.*** WE GUIDE ***ONLY*** THOSE WHO ***ASK,*** AND EVEN ***THEN*** THEY MUSTN'T KNOW IT'S ***US...***

...FOR THE HUMAN SOUL IS SALVATION FOR ***ALL*** OF US.

SALVATION?

DOES THAT INCLUDE THE TORTURED AND DAMNED?

GUARDS! GET SECURITY IN HERE-- NOW! WE HAVE A LEVEL EIGHT ATTACK!! CLEAR THE LEADER AWAY FROM THE THREAT!

VIOLENCE, FROM EITHER SIDE, WILL NOT END OUR DIFFICULTIES.

WHERE IS HE?

YOU KIDNAPPED MY FRIEND. I'VE COME TO TAKE HIM BACK.

HOW DARE YOU COME HERE! YOUR MASTER KNOWS THIS A CONFLICT-FREE, NEUTRAL ZONE. YOUR SIDE HAS JUST MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE BY DISOBEYING THE PEACE TREATY. OUR CEASE-FIRE IS NOW VOID!

WHAT'S TAKING SECURITY--?

ABRUPTLY, THAT QUESTION BECOMES MOOT.

SURROUND HIM.

PREPARE TO FIRE, AT MY COMMAND.

YOU'VE GOT NOWHERE TO RUN, HELL-SPAWN. GIVE YOURSELF UP-- OR DIE.

HEV - TEC

CORNERED.

WITH NO WAY TO ESCAPE, SPAWN CONSIDERS HIS NEXT TACTIC. INSTINCTIVELY, FOR PROTECTION, HE GRABS THE THING CLOSEST TO HIM.

DON'T MAKE ME HURT HER. JUST GIVE ME WHAT I WANT, AND I'LL LEAVE.

AS HE DELIVERS HIS THREAT, HE'S AWARE OF THE COSTUME GOING LIMP.

IT MUST BE TIRED, HE THINKS. THE CHANGES HAVE COME AT A PRICE.

SPAWN'S MIND THEN FLASHES BACK TO EVENTS A FEW HOURS EARLIER.

THE REDEEMER HAD JUST TAKEN BOBBY. VANISHED RIGHT BEFORE HIS EYES. SPAWN WAS LEFT, POWERLESS, LYING IN STINKING DEBRIS IN THE ALLEY.

THEN IT HAPPENED. THE COSTUME AROSE FROM THE DEAD.

IT FELT DIFFERENT NOW... CHANGED SOMEHOW BY ITS OWN INTERNAL NEEDS. SPAWN SENSED ITS NEW MOOD.

IT WAS ANGRY.

THE ONLY THING LACKING WAS A DIRECTION FOR THE ANGER TO VENT.

I SEE YOU'RE STILL TRYING TO LEARN. YOU MIGHT NEED *THIS*.

CAGLIOSTRO. A MYSTERIOUS VAGRANT, WHO IN SOME STRANGE FASHION, KNEW WHAT SPAWN WAS GOING THROUGH.

WHAT IS IT?

INFORMATION.

BUT IT'S BLANK.

YOU STILL HAVE MUCH TO ACCEPT. YOUR FRIEND NEEDS YOU. CONTROL YOUR RAGE SO THAT YOU MAY *HELP* HIM.

LOOK *AGAIN*.

9 East 48th St.

AN ADDRESS. WHEN HE LOOKED UP, CAGLIOSTRO WAS GONE.

IT DIDN'T MATTER. SPAWN KNEW WHAT HAD TO BE DONE.

HE JUST DIDN'T THINK IT WOULD GET COMPLICATED SO **FAST.**

COMMANDER, DO YOU **SEE**?! HE'S GOT...

I KNOW I **KNOW!**

YEAH, I'VE GOT HER. NOW BACK AWAY. ALL OF YOU. I WANT THIS ROOM **CLEARED.**

WITH THE COSTUME WEAK AND SPAWN NOT AT FULL STRENGTH, IT SURPRISES HIM HOW QUICKLY THEY ACCEPT HIS BLUFF.

HE HAD NO BACK-UP PLAN IF THEY **DIDN'T.**

EXCEPT **YOU!**

IT SEEMS YOU'RE THE LEADER-- SO YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S GOING TO HELP SOLVE MY PROBLEM.

I **SWEAR**-- IF YOU HURT HER, I'LL BRING ALL OF **HEAVEN** DOWN UPON YOU!

LADY, I'M NOT CONCERNED ABOUT ME RIGHT NOW. I WANT MY FRIEND, BOBBY. NOW WHERE IS HE?

YOUR FRIEND IS NOWHERE **NEAR** HERE.

AN **INTELLIGENT** SPAWN WOULD **KNOW** THAT.

IT'S OBVIOUS YOUR MASTER HAS PICKED **ANOTHER** WEAK CANDIDATE TO BE HIS MESSENGER.

EST ROOMS

MEN

MAGGIE

I'VE TRIED EVERY-THING. I JUST KEEP RUNNING INTO BRICK WALLS. YOU KNOW HOW SLICK THE C.I.A. CAN BE. I'M JUST SORRY I HAVEN'T MADE TIME LATELY FOR YOU AND CYAN, BUT THIS MESS IS ALL I THINK ABOUT.

I CAN'T REST UNTIL IT'S SOLVED. UNFORTUNATELY, THEY'VE FORCED MY HAND.

WHAT D'YA MEAN?

EVER SINCE THEY ABRUPTLY STOPPED ACCUSING ME OF BEING A ***SPY***, I'VE BEEN TREATED REALLY WELL. ***TOO*** NICELY, IF YOU ASK ME. THEY'VE OFFERED ME NUMEROUS GREAT PROMOTIONS, BUT I THINK IT'S THEIR WAY OF BUYING MY ***SILENCE***. NOW I'M BACKED INTO A CORNER AND THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO ***TAKE*** ONE OF THOSE OFFERS. I HAVE TO GET ***CLOSER*** TO WYNN IF I'M GOING TO ***SOLVE*** THIS.

I'VE ALREADY COMPLETED MY TRANSFER PAPERS.

YOU CAN'T BE ***SERIOUS***.

DEADLY.

TERRY FITZGERALD AND WANDA BLAKE SIT NOW IN AWKWARD SILENCE. THEN, AN UNSPOKEN UNDERSTANDING IS ACHIEVED.

APPLICATION

TRANSF

BOTH PRAY THEY'VE MADE A WISE DECISION.

CALMLY, HE RECLINES IN HIS CHAIR. JASON WYNN, SUPREME DIRECTOR OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES, IS NOT GIVEN TO HYSTERICS.

I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY MORE! YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING! ANYTHING! THIS COULD RUIN OUR CAREERS! OUR LIVES!

CALM YOURSELF, MY FRIEND. NO ONE IS GOING TO DESTROY US.

ARE YOU CRAZY?! SOMEONE'S LINKED US TO BILLY KINCAID! HANGING OUT WITH A CHILD KILLER -- THAT DOESN'T GET SWEPT AWAY TOO EASILY!

HOW MANY OTHERS DO YOU THINK KNOW ABOUT THIS?!

I'VE RECEIVED A FILE CONTAINING CLASSIFIED INFORMATION WHICH NO OUTSIDER SHOULD HAVE. THE FILE WAS GIVEN BY SOMEONE CALLED SPAWN. *

* ISSUE 24 -- Tom.

WHAT!!

WHY WOULD SOME PSYCHO HERO HAVE IT IN FOR US?

ALL I KNOW IS, I'M NOT ABOUT TO LOSE EVERYTHING I'VE WORKED FOR. SO YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. ANYTHING!

BELIEVE ME, BANKS, I'VE ALREADY STARTED.

I'M NO ONE'S PUPPET. PERIOD.

I'LL KEEP THIS SIMPLE. YOU'VE GOT EXACTLY **FIVE SECONDS** TO TELL ME WHERE MY FRIEND IS.

OTHERWISE, **GRANDMA** HERE IS GOING TO BE MY PROVERBIAL "EYE FOR AN EYE."

ANOTHER BLUFF. IT'S ALL HE HAS LEFT.

IDIOT!

YOUR FRIEND ISN'T ***HERE.*** HE'S NOT EVEN ON ***EARTH!***

THAT'S **YOUR** PROBLEM.

LIKE I SAID...

FIVE.

FOUR.

THREE.

TWO.

ALL RIGHT. YOU WIN.

*LUCKILY. FOR-- INEXPLICABLY-- HIS POWERS HAVE **SHUT DOWN.***

ORBITAL STATION ONE, COME IN. THIS IS TERRAN HEAD-QUARTERS.

ACKNOWLEDGED

WE NEED YOU TO RETURN THE CAPTURED SENTIENT BEING TO OUR BASE IMMEDIATELY.

REQUEST DENIED

EXPERIMENTS ON THAT SUBJECT ARE INCOMPLETE AT PRESENT. CURRENT DATA SHOW PERPLEXING READINGS. UNABLE TO RELEASE SUBJECT AT THIS TIME.

GENTLEMEN, THIS IS *NOT* A REQUEST. IT IS A *COMMAND*, AND AS YOUR SUPERIOR I *DEMAND* THAT HE BE SENT DOWN HERE *AT ONCE* WITH THE PROPER ESCORT. YOU HAVE *ONE MINUTE* TO COMPLY WITH MY ORDERS. DO YOU *UNDERSTAND?*

AFFIRMATIVE

SECONDS LATER, A PIERCING BLAST OF LIGHT ANNOUNCES BOBBY'S RETURN TO EARTH.

WITH HIM COMES THE **REDEEMER**-- THE ONE WHO MADE OFF WITH HIM IN THE FIRST PLACE. SPAWN HAD SPECULATED ON THIS TURN OF EVENTS.

HE WAS HOPING IT WOULDN'T HAVE COME TO THIS.

RELEASE HIM AND I'LL GO PEACEFULLY.

IT'S **FAR** TOO LATE FOR THAT. YOU'VE BROKEN THE PACT BETWEEN OUR DOMAINS BY INVADING THIS SITE AND THREATENING OUR LEADER.

AL... HELP ME.

YOU'LL *NOT* GO UNPUNISHED.

REDEEMER-- *FINISH HIM!*

SPAWN BRACES HIMSELF FOR IMPACT. HE'D BEEN TOSSED AROUND BY THE REDEEMER AT THEIR PREVIOUS MEETING,* AND NOW DOUBTS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WHETHER HE CAN SAVE HIS FRIEND.

HE'LL NEVER SETTLE THAT PROBLEM BECAUSE THE SITUATION HAS SUDDENLY CHANGED. **IT** IS ALIVE AGAIN.

THE **COSTUME.**

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

ITS CHAINS, SWINGING WILDLY, **SWAT** THE ATTACKER IN MIDAIR. THEY THEN WRAP LIKE A **COBRA** AROUND THE DAZED REDEEMER.

IT IS ACTING COMPLETELY ON ITS OWN.

BOBBY! GET CLEAR OF IT-- HURRY!

LIKE SOME FEROCIOUS BEAST, THE COSTUME FLAILS VIOLENTLY. IT WILL ALLOW NOTHING TO COME NEAR. THEN, LIKE THE CHAINS, THE CAPE LAUNCHED ITS OWN ATTACK.

LIKE LIMBS AND CLAWS AND TEETH...

C'MON, LADY! WHAT'RE YOU STANDING THERE FOR?! YOU WANT TO GET KILLED?!!

BOBBY! TAKE GRANDMA WITH YOU!

...THE COSTUME PARTS DEFEND THEIR HOST.

BY WHATEVER MEANS NECESSARY.

THE REDEEMER REACTS LESS WITH ANGER THAN SHOCK AT THE SUDDEN **AMPUTATION**. UNCONTROLLABLY, THE STUMP SPEWS **ELEMENTAL FIRE**, DEMOLISHING EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH...

... ITS DEVASTATION THREATENING EVEN THOSE HE **SERVES**...

... YET SPAWN TURNS HIS BACK TO THE BARRAGE WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT.

GRANNY, I'M SORRY I HAD TO USE YOU EARLIER, BUT I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.

I UNDERSTAND.

GREAT! NOW I NEED TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE. IT'S NOT SAFE.

AS HE TOUCHES HER ARM TO GUIDE HER, THE COSTUME BECOMES LIFELESS AGAIN. BEFORE SPAWN CAN EVEN REACT, THE REDEEMER **BLASTS** HIM, FACE ON.

THE INTENSE FORCE THROWS SPAWN INTO BOBBY, THEN SLAMS BOTH INTO THE NEXT ROOM.

WHILE HE LAYS CATCHING HIS BREATH, SPAWN TURNS TO SEE THAT THE **ARTILLERY** HAS ARRIVED.

FIRE AT WILL! DON'T LET HIM *ESCAPE* THIS TIME!

TO HIS MIND, THIS IS **ARMAGEDDON.**

AL! **DO** SOME-THING!

HANG ON, BOBBY. WE'RE GOING TO...

KRAK!

THE BUILDING'S OUTER SHELL EVAPORATES.

IN A HEARTBEAT, TRILLIONS OF MOLECULES DISINTEGRATE.

TRANSFERRED AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT, THEY REASSEMBLE IN THE WASTE AND DECAY OF NEW YORK CITY'S **BOWERY.**

6:9:0:2

CAG?! I NEED YOUR HELP. AL'S NOT ***MOVING!*** I THINK HE'S HURT.

HE'S JUST UNCONSCIOUS. DON'T WORRY.

OUR FRIEND FARED SURPRISINGLY WELL, CONSIDERING HE JUST SURVIVED A BATTLE WITH GOD.

WHAT DO YA MEAN? ARE YOU SAYING **GOD** WAS UP THERE?!!

A CHAMELEON OF SORTS, THE ***LORD*** CAN APPEAR IN MANY FORMS.

HOW COULD YOU LET THIS *HAPPEN*, RAFAEL?

ME?! DON'T YOU *DARE* ACCUSE ME. IT WAS THE *SECURITY SYSTEM* THAT FAILED, NOT *MY* AUTHORITY.

BUT, OUR FORTRESS HAS NEVER BEEN BREACHED BY ONE OF *THEM* BEFORE.

GIRLS.

PLEASE. MAY I HAVE A MOMENT?

-- AND THOSE WHO ARE TRULY *EVIL*. TODAY, THE SYSTEM WORKED PERFECTLY... FOR OUR VISITOR WAS *NEITHER*. MY CHILDREN, YOU ARE TOO QUICK TO *ACT*. THE INTRUDER IS MORE THAN YOU THINK. MUCH LIKE YOURSELVES, HE STRUGGLES TO FIND ANSWERS. ON HIS QUEST HE IS FACED WITH CONFUSION...

... AND FROM THE CONDUCT I WITNESSED TODAY, I'D SAY SO ARE *YOU*, PROVING TO ME THAT *NEITHER* SIDE IS READY FOR THE GREAT BATTLE.

YOU SEE, THOUGH AL SIMMONS DOESN'T KNOW IT, I *ALLOWED* HIM TO DO WHAT HE DID -- BECAUSE HE WAS FIGHTING NOT FOR HIMSELF, BUT FOR A *FRIEND*.

THIS EVENT HAS BEEN *NO* ONE'S FAULT. AS YOU ARE ALL AWARE, THE SECURITY SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO DETER THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE --

YET MAKE NO MISTAKE. THE SPARKS HAVE BEEN STRUCK. AND ONE DAY, WITH TIME AND GUIDANCE, *HIS TIME* WILL COME.

HE IS DESTINED TO BE THE *ONE*.

CHILL NIGHT AIR BLANKETS MANHATTAN AS THE CLOUDS BREAK UP.

AS ACTIVITY RESUMES ITS NORMAL PACE, THE STREETS ARE SLOWLY RID OF ALL EVIDENCE OF A DOWN-POUR.

MIXING WITH WASTE AND LITTER, THE RAIN-WATER GATHERS MOMENTUM...

THROUGH THESE BLACK BOWELS, THE STREETS SLOUGH OFF THEIR UNWANTED GARBAGE.

IT'S TIME.

FIRST YOU'LL FEEL THE PHYSICAL *PAIN* AS I TEAR YOU APART. *PIECE* BY PIECE.

...CARVING PATHS TO HUNDREDS OF SCATTERED DRAINAGES.

THE *RAIN* IS OVER.

LIMB BY LIMB.

THEN I'LL *NAIL* YOU WHERE IT COUNTS THE MOST-- YOUR ONE TRULY *WEAK* PLACE--

--THE *HEART.*

AND WHILE YOU'RE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHO'S *FRIEND* AND WHO'S *FOE*--

--*I'LL* BE WATCHING FROM THE SHADOWS, WAITING FOR JUST THE *RIGHT* MOMENT.

HAHAHAHA

THE THING THAT MADE YOU A SPAWN IN THE *FIRST* PLACE.

A FIENDISH CACKLE REVERBERATES THROUGH THE REEKING SUBTERRANEAN MAZE.

THE NEXT EVENING.

EVENTUALLY, THE SICK LAUGHTER FADES.

THE DEBATE HAS GONE ON FOR AN **HOUR** NOW, WITH NO DECISION IN SIGHT.

ITS TOPIC IS ONE THAT'S MADE THE ROUNDS A DOZEN TIMES BEFORE: IS THE PRESENCE OF THIS DARK, CAPED GUARDIAN A **BLESSING** TO THE LOCAL VAGRANTS... OR A **CURSE?**

IF I STAY HERE, YOU MUST BE PREPARED FOR ALL-OUT **WAR.** ANY **TIME.** ANY **PLACE.** AND SOME OF YOUR **FRIENDS** MAY BE AMONG THE ENEMY.

YOU THINK ABOUT **THAT**... AND HOW DEEP YOU WANT TO BE INVOLVED IN SOMETHING YOU CAN'T **CONTROL.**

WE ALREADY ***TOLD*** YOU, AL, THOSE WEREN'T ***OUR*** PALS THAT TRIED TO KILL YOU.*

BUNCH'A YELLOW-BELLY ***RATS,*** THAT'S ALL.

I'VE FOUND ANOTHER PLACE I CAN GO. IT'D BE SAFER FOR **ALL** OF US.

CAN I SAY SOMETHING? WHAT A LOAD OF ***CRAP!***

* SEE THE ENTIRE ***BLOOD-FEUD*** MINI-SERIES -- Tom.

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM, BOBBY?

YOU.

WHAT?!

LOOK, YOU WANT TO RUN OUT ON US AGAIN, *FINE*. THAT'S YOUR CALL. BUT DON'T TRY TO PIN *ANY* OF THIS ON *US*.

WE'RE NOT AS FRAGILE AS YOU THINK.

YOU SEE, AL, THIS TROUBLE DIDN'T *START* WITH YOU. WHAT WE GO THROUGH HAS BEEN THIS WAY FOR A LONG TIME. THE PSYCHOS, CRIME AND VIOLENCE... *NONE* OF *THAT'S* GOING TO CHANGE.

WE'LL STILL GET BEAT UP, SHOT AT AND MUGGED BY THE BAD GUYS. *HELL!* EVEN THE *GOOD* GUYS PICK ON US, SO FORGET THE NURSEMAID CRAP.

WE'LL SURVIVE. ALWAYS HAVE.

BUT I'M COMPOUNDING THESE PROBLEMS BY BEING EVERYONE'S TARGET.

IT'S BEEN A FRIGGIN' SEA OF FREAKS...

"...COPS. MONSTERS.

"HITMEN. YOU NAME IT. EVERY WEIRDO POSSIBLE WAS TRASHING YOUR HOME.

"THAT'S NOT FAIR TO ANY OF YOU."

FAIR?

CRIPES! WE'RE SOCIETY'S *GARBAGE.* *WE* AIN'T NEVER GOING TO GET A FAIR SHAKE. AS FOR THE *INTRUDERS,* THAT'S *YOUR* PROBLEM TO FIX.

BUT THEY'VE BECOME YOURS, TOO.

THEN *DO* SOMETHING ABOUT IT, *DAMN IT!* STOP THE *WHINING* AND TAKE THE BULL BY THE *HORN!*

BUT I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING, CHAPEL *DIDN'T* ACT ALONE. ONE THING I KNOW FROM MY VIETNAM DAYS, A GOOD SOLDIER ONLY ACTS WHEN *ORDERED.*

SOMEONE TOLD HIM TO PULL THE TRIGGER. THERE'S *YOUR* TARGET. FIND THE BUGGER WHO STOLE YOUR IDENTITY, YOUR LIFE, AND EVERYTHING YOU *LOVED.*

... INCLUDING YOUR WIFE.

REMEMBER-- CHAPEL KILLED ME, *TOO.** IF *I* HAD YOUR POWER, I'D *KILL* THE PIG... IF HE WEREN'T *ALREADY* DEAD.

A MOMENT OF AWKWARD SILENCE.

THEN...

THANKS, BOBBY.

ELSEWHERE, THE MIRACLES OF MODERN MEDICINE ARE HARD AT WORK.

MORNING! HOW'S OUR FAVORITE GUY DOING TODAY?

OPEN WIDE, SWEETY. *THERE* WE GO. WE NEED TO MAKE SURE YOU'RE NOT *TOO* HOT IN THERE.

LUCKY STIFF.

AND HERE I WAS STARTING TO FEEL *SORRY* FOR YOU.

SIR!

WHAT A NICE SURPRISE!

WELL, WE'LL LEAVE YOU TWO ALONE. NOW REMEMBER, YOU BEHAVE YOURSELF, TWITCHIE.

MMMMMM!! WHY IS IT THAT WHEN *I* GET SICK, THE NURSES ARE BIG, FAT, HAIRY AND LOOK LIKE *BULLDOGS?*

PURE LUCK, SIR.

LOOK, TWITCH, I'VE DECIDED TO PUT EVERYTHING ON THE BACK BURNER FOR A WHILE. CONCENTRATE ON YOUR CASE EXCLUSIVELY. IT'S HIGH TIME I FIGURED OUT WHAT THAT *SPAWN'S* ABOUT. AIN'T *NO* ONE GOING TO TOUCH MY BUDDY AND NOT *PAY* FOR IT SOME WAY.*

* SEE *BLOODFEUD* MINI-SERIES -- Tom.

THANKS, GRANDMA.

C'MON. SERIOUSLY, THE DOC SAYS THERE'S STILL A CHANCE FOR PROBLEMS. SOME SERIOUS. HOW YOU FEELING. REALLY.

I HURT.

HURT LIKE HELL.

BUT I NEED YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR. *FORGET* ABOUT ME. IF CHIEF BANKS IS TIED TO SOME CHILD KILLER, *BRING HIM DOWN.*

I'M IN PAIN, BUT NOWHERE AS MUCH AS THE PARENTS OF THOSE SLAUGHTERED KIDS.

DO YOU UNDER-STAND?

DADDY! DADDY!

MOM'S OUT TALKING TO THE DOCTORS, SHE'LL BE IN SHORTLY.

HOW'R'YA DOING, DAD?

COOL, DAD! YOU LOOK LIKE *FRANKEN-STEIN!*

MOM'S BEEN CRYING LOTS, BUT I'VE BEEN A *BIG* GIRL.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT, PARTNER.

BOSS?

IS THAT YOU?

BOSS.

SO.

THERE YOU ARE.

SPAWN. HE'S TALKING CRAZY LIKE HE'S GONNA *LEAVE* OR SOMETHING. JUST LIKE YOU SAID.

DO ME A FAVOR.

SURE, BOSS. ANYTHING. I'LL DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.

GET LOST. BUT COME BACK IN A FEW DAYS. I NEED SOME HELP SETTING A *TRAP* FOR OUR FRIEND.

THE REBUILDING SEEMS TO BE PROCEEDING AS SCHEDULED. YOUR OFFICE SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE IN ABOUT FIVE DAYS.

IT'D ***BETTER*** BE, TIFFANY. THIS DISTRACTION HAS PUT ME BEHIND ON A FEW CRUCIAL MATTERS.

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE WE LET THE HELLSPAWN GO. *

*LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

REMEMBER WHAT OUR LEADER SAID, RAPHAEL. THE SPAWN WAS ONLY ACTING AS WE WOULD HAVE.

DON'T PATRONIZE ME, TIFFANY.

THAT WASN'T MY INTENTION. I CAN APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT YOUR SECTOR HAS BEEN DISRUPTED, BUT THINGS COULD BE WORSE.

AT LEAST THE BUILDING'S ***EXTERIOR*** APPEARANCE IS NORMAL.

"MANKIND SEES JUST ANOTHER CORPORATE ENTITY... NOT THEIR ATTENTIVE ***PROTECTORS.***"

JASON WYNN, SUPREME DIRECTOR OF ALL U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES, PACES HIS OFFICE, BROODING OVER HIS CURRENT IMPASSE.

SOMEBODY DEEP IN THE ORGANIZATION IS TRYING TO SLIT MY THROAT. AND NOW I'VE GOT POLICE CHIEF *BANKS* CRACKING UNDER THE PRESSURE.

THAT *FILE*. HOW THE HELL DID SPAWN EVEN GET *NEAR* IT? THE GODDAMN SYSTEM SHOULD HAVE CREATED RED HERRINGS FOR HIM TO CHASE.

WE *KNOW* FITZGERALD'S NOT SPAWN, BUT HE STILL HAS A STINK ABOUT HIM. THE WHOLE SET-UP IS FAR TOO CONVENIENT.

EXCUSE ME, SIR. I'VE CHECKED WITH PERSONNEL AND HIS TRANSFER IS COMPLETELY LEGITIMATE. EVERYTHING'S BY THE BOOK.

GET HIM.

Ah, MR. FITZGERALD, WHAT A WONDERFUL SURPRISE. I'VE LOOKED FORWARD TO THIS DAY FOR A LONG TIME.

THIS IS NO COINCIDENCE. BANKS. THE FILE. NOW *THIS*. AT LEAST IT'LL BE THAT MUCH EASIER TO KEEP HIM UNDER SURVEILLANCE.

HE'S BEEN BRIEFED AND BEGINS REPORTING TO YOU TOMORROW MORNING.

UNKNOWN TO WYNN, TERRY FITZGERALD IS PREPARING TO PLAY THE SAME GAME.

A FEW NIGHTS LATER...

Um.

AL.

AL SIMMONS?

SOME TIME AGO, TOO MANY PEOPLE KNEW FAR **TOO MUCH** ABOUT HIM. THEY HAD KNOWLEDGE THAT KEPT HIM TRAPPED, WITH ENOUGH LEFT OVER TO EVENTUALLY COST HIM HIS **LIFE.**

NOW, GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE, AL HAS ENSURED THAT THOSE AROUND HIM KNOW ONLY WHAT HE **WANTS** THEM TO KNOW. HE'S REVEALED JUST GENERAL INFORMATION.

ONE FACT ESPECIALLY HAS BECOME SACRED, PROTECTED AT ALL COSTS: HIS **IDENTITY.**

NO ONE WOULD HAVE **ANY** WAY OF KNOWING IT.

WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?!

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

I DON'T.

SOME STRANGER WANTED ME TO FIND YOU. THEN, I WAS SUPPOSED TO SAY THREE THINGS: AL SIMMONS. JASON WYNN. AND SOMETHING ABOUT WANDA.

AND THAT HE WANTS TO *MEET* YOU.

THEN **GO!** TELL YOUR STRANGER HE KNOWS WHERE HE CAN **FIND** ME.

WHY ME?

HE DIDN'T SAY. I'M JUST A MESSENGER.

SPAWN RELEASES HIS PREY, KNOWING IT WILL SCURRY TO ITS MASTER.

AND WHEN IT DOES...

...SPAWN WILL BE WAITING.

FOR TONIGHT, THE SHADOWS WILL LIVE.

HE GIVES HIS TARGET SOME SPACE. NO NEED TO TIP HIS HAND YET.

PSSST! OVER HERE.

BOSS?

DID HE TAKE THE BAIT?

I THINK SO.

HOPEFULLY, HE'S FOLLOWING, LIKE YOU WANTED. WHAT'S NEXT?

A RAPID, GROTESQUE TRANSFORMATION!

I'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE. THANK YOU.

YOU'VE SERVED MY PURPOSE.

A HEARTBEAT LATER, THE SKY IS BLANKETED IN **RED.**

DAMN.

I ONLY LOST SIGHT OF HIM FOR A SECOND. THE POOR SAP. PROBABLY DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT HE **DIED** FOR.

BUT THE KILL'S STILL **FRESH.**

THE **KILLER** CAN'T BE FAR.

IT ISN'T.

SPAWN PLUMMETS 40 FEET TO THE WORLD THAT LIES BELOW.

YOUR EXISTENCE HAS BECOME A *FARCE*. YOU'VE LEARNED NOTHING ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE.

IT'S AN *HONOR* TO BE CHOSEN A HELLSPAWN! DO YOU *UNDERSTAND*?! AN HONOR!!!

YOU GET SOMETHING STRAIGHT. HELL PICKED ME-- NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

SO I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT YOU THINK.

THEN YOU'RE A *FOOL*, LITTLE BOY--

YOU SEE, I HEAR YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT SKIPPING TOWN, AGAIN.

WELL, I *DON'T* THINK THAT'S SUCH A WISE DECISION, BECAUSE WE *WOULDN'T* WANT TO HAVE YOUR SERVANT BUMS LOOKING LIKE OUR SLAUGHTERED *FRIEND* UPSTAIRS..

NOW *WOULD* WE?

--BECAUSE YOU *DON'T* HAVE A CHOICE! SO YOU'D *BETTER* CARE WHAT I THINK.

THE CHAIN SNAPS TO LIFE, TRIGGERED BY SPAWN'S RAGE.

YOU STAY AWAY FROM THEM.

Oh, I *WILL.*

BUT *ONLY* AS LONG AS YOU STAY IN THIS AREA. I WANT TO KNOW *EXACTLY* WHERE I CAN FIND YOU, DAY OR NIGHT.

EVERY SOUND. EVERY *SHADOW*. *THINK* OF ME.

'CAUSE ONE DAY I'LL COME TO *OBLITERATE* YOU!

THAT'LL PROVE ONCE AND FOR ALL THAT **NONE** ARE AS WORTHY OF THE SPAWN TITLE AS HELL'S *TRUE* CITIZENS.

AFTER ALL, I CAN KILL AS WELL AS YOU CAN.

THAT CORPSE UP ABOVE... MUST HAVE WARMED YOUR BLOOD JUST SEEING IT.

REMEMBER HOW GOOD YOU WERE AT GUTTING PEOPLE LIKE THAT...?

NO!

BUT SPAWN KNOWS IT'S TRUE. AS A GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED ASSASSIN, HE REGULARLY INVENTED NEW WAYS TO DISMEMBER.

HE BECAME AN EXPERT AT SNUFFING LIVES OUT.

... A COSTUME MESHED WITH HIS FLESH IN SYMBIOSIS... CREATING AN ENTITY WHICH HE TRIES NOT TO THINK ABOUT:

IT'S THAT TRAIT, COMBINED WITH ANGER, WHICH FEEDS HIS COSTUME...

... A KILLER, BASIC AND TOTAL.

THE *UNIFORM!* HOW'D YOU TRAIN IT TO MORPH *THIS* SOON? IT SHOULD STILL BE *INCU-BATING!*

NEARBY, SHROUDED IN DARKNESS, A PAIR OF INQUIR-ING EYES SOAK UP THE UNFOLD-ING ACTION.

SPAWN IS COMPLETELY CONFUSED BY THE VIOLATOR'S OUTBURST.

TELL ME! WHO'S HELPING YOU?!

AS THE DEADLY ASSAULT CONTINUES, NEITHER OPPONENT IS AWARE OF THE DAMAGE BEING DONE.

SOON, ONE OF THE COMBATANTS IS LOST IN THE MURKY LIQUID.

THE VAST TUNNELS HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED BY THE CITY FOR YEARS...

...SO IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH BEFORE AN ALREADY WEAKENED WATER-LINE GIVES, EXPLODING WITH COUNTLESS TONS OF SEWAGE.

LIKE ANOTHER PIECE OF GARBAGE CAUGHT IN THE DELUGE, THE HERO IS SLAMMED FROM SIDE TO SIDE.

SURVIVAL IS HIS ONLY PRIORITY.

HE LEARNS THAT HIS BODY, NOW COMPOSED OF NECRO-PLASM, STILL NEEDS OXYGEN.

GASP!

AND WORSE. THE VIOLATOR HAS VANISHED. SPAWN EXPECTS, THOUGH, THAT HE'S SOME-WHERE IN THESE SEWERS-- UNHARMED...

... AND THAT HE'S AT THE MERCY OF THAT CREATURE'S NEXT MOVE.

6:8:8:7

TO BE CONTINUED...

ISSUE 34

THE CREATURE IS ROUGH. BRISTLY. **GHASTLY** TO THE TOUCH.

IT WAS BORN AN ETERNITY AGO IN THE FOULEST CORNER OF HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL. ITS AVOWED PURPOSE, AS WITH ITS MISSHAPEN KIN, IS TO SERVE THE MASTER.

THE **MALEBOLGIA.**

DEEP IN ITS SHRIVELED HEART, IT KNOWS THE TRUTH: THAT THERE IS NO REASON FOR ITS EXISTENCE. IT DENIES THIS TRUTH, **DEFIES** IT... AND SO HAS CARVED ITSELF A **MISSION.**

THE CREATURE **FIGHTS** FOR THAT MISSION WITH A FIERCENESS AND LOYALTY RARELY SEEN AMONG ITS KIND.

EVENTUALLY THIS SERVITUDE LED IT INTO THE MASTER'S INNER CIRCLE.

IT WAS GIVEN THE FUNCTION OF 'SPAWN WARDEN,' OF INDOCTRINATING THE NEW OFFICERS IN HELL'S ARMY. THE DUTIES WERE SIMPLE.

BUT AS EACH SUCCEEDING SPAWN WENT OFF ON ASSIGNMENT, THE MONSTER'S PATIENCE CAME CLOSER TO ITS **LIMIT.**

WHY WERE **OUTSIDERS** BEING GIVEN SUCH OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE? WEREN'T THE **LOCALS** BETTER CONDITIONED FOR THE GREAT WAR WITH GOD?

THE QUESTIONS STARTED AS A JOKE, BUT WITH EACH FAILED HELLSPAWN THE NAGGING DOUBTS BECAME MORE **URGENT**...

... BUT THE CREATURE NEVER SHOWED ITS APPREHENSION.

IT DIDN'T DARE. THE FAMILY WOULD BE DISGRACED AND HE WOULD CERTAINLY BECOME AN OUTCAST. THUS DID THE CENTURIES PASS.

HIS DESIRE TO PLEASE THE MASTER BECAME INSATIABLE. HE BECAME FAR MORE VICIOUS THAN NECESSARY.

THE TITLE 'VIOLATOR' WAS BESTOWED, AND WORN LIKE A BADGE OF HONOR.

THOSE **DOUBTS**, THOUGH, CAUSED HIM TO STRAY ODDLY ON A PARTICULAR MISSION. HE FELL FROM FAVOR AND WAS BANISHED TO EARTH.

NOW, VIOLATOR'S ONLY HOPE IS TO **BEAT** THE CURRENT HELLSPAWN, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY.

HORRK!

JUST NOW, THAT PLAN HAS HIT A FEW BUMPS.

THEIR MOST RECENT STRUGGLE HAD BARELY BEGUN WHEN THEY WERE INTERRUPTED BY A **RUPTURED PIPELINE.** SOME CRAZY HUMAN HAD THEN SEEN FIT TO SAVE THE DEMON FROM DROWNING.

THAT'S IT, RUN AWAY, EARTH *SCUM!*

WHO NEEDS YOUR DAMN HELP ANYWAY? I CAN BREATHE AIR OR WATER...

THE SILHOUETTE VANISHES, LEAVING ONLY THE ECHO OF SPLASHING FOOTSTEPS.

YOU'RE LUCKY I'M NOT IN THE MOOD FOR CASUAL DISMEMBERMENT.

ANY

OTHER

CLOWNING AROUND.

OR

THE GROTESQUE TRANSFORMATION LASTS BUT A FEW HEARTBEATS. LEFT IN THE DEMON'S PLACE IS ITS BEST ATTEMPT AT BEING HUMAN.

FART!

SOMETHING'S WRONG-- BIG TIME!! AIN'T NO WAY SPAWNIE'S UNIFORM SHOULD HAVE TRANSMUTED THIS FAST. THE FRIGGIN' THING COULD HAVE DONE ME SOME SERIOUS *DAMAGE*.

WHICH ONLY MAKES MY ORIGINAL INTENT OF DESTROYING HIM FROM A *DISTANCE* MORE VALID.

IT'S A SLIGHT CURVEBALL, BUT NOTHIN' I CAN'T HIT.

SIX DAYS WILL PASS BEFORE HE ACTS AGAIN.

NANA! NANA!

CYAN! HELLO, SWEETHEART. MY, MY, AREN'T WE A BIG GIRL THESE DAYS.

HI, GRANDMA. HOW HAVE YOU BEEN FEELING LATELY. THE DOCTOR'S SAID TH

NANA! DOWN MOMMY!

OKAY! OKAY! WHAT A SQUIRMY KID!

Oh, I'M FINE, DEAR. THOSE DOCTORS DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING. NOTHING YOUR VISITS WON'T CURE.

HOW ARE THINGS WITH YOU AND TERRY?

NOT BAD. HE JUST TRANSFERRED INTO A NEW DEPARTMENT. HE WAS LOOKING FOR A CHANGE AFTER THAT WHOLE MURDER FIASCO.

AND I'M UP TO MY NECK TRYING TO ORGANIZE THIS UPCOMING FUND-RAISER FOR THE CHILDRENS' SOCIETY.

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN SO GENEROUS, WANDA. I HOPE YOU NEVER LOSE THAT.

AS ONE CHILD SETTLES INTO HER GRANDMA'S SWEET EMBRACE, ANOTHER AMBLES UNPROTECTED THROUGH AN URBAN CESSPOOL.

THESE STREETS HAVE, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSE, BECOME HIS HOME.

LUST
TRIPLE X SEX
GIRLS
XX

YO, TYRONE, WHAT IT IS.

IT'S THE MAN.

TUGGED AT. PULLED. THE YOUNG BOY BARELY PAYS ATTENTION.

AT TEN YEARS OF AGE THERE IS VERY LITTLE HE HASN'T SEEN.

HEY, BOY!

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SE
XX
25¢

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU.

WHA...?

HE IS JUST ANOTHER OF SOCIETY'S FORGOTTEN VICTIMS.

YOU BEEN MESSIN' WITH ME, TYRONE. I DON'T LIKE *THAT.*

SEE, I GOT ME A REPUTATION--AND AIN'T *NO* ONE GOING TO PLAY WITH THAT. ESPECIALLY NOT SOME *PUNK*ASS *KID.*

YOU TELL 'IM, *STINKY!*

SO--WHAT'RE WE GOING TO DO *ABOUT* THIS?

I'VE AN *IDEA.*

THE GOING RATE ON MY STUFF IS THREE HUNDRED BUCKS. *BUT*-- FOR *YOU* I'M GOING TO CHARGE ONLY *SIX* HUNDRED!

NO!

Oh, YES! THINK QUICK, BOY! AIN'T NO ONE AROUND TO *HELP* YOU CHOOSE.

THOUGH HE'S NEVER LET OTHERS PUSH HIM AROUND, TYRONE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO RESIST.

SO THE DEAL IS DONE.

GOOD. NOW GET THE HELL OUTTA HERE. I GOT ME *ANOTHER* APPOINT-MENT.

FOR STINKY, THAT 'APPOINTMENT' IS A SHORT WALK DOWN THE STREET, IN A BUILDING MARKED ONLY BY A SINGLE RED LIGHT DANGLING ABOVE A BLACK STEEL DOOR.

HE SHUFFLES PAST THE MAZE OF AISLES LITTERED WITH PORNOGRAPHIC MAGAZINES AND VIDEOS UNIMAGINABLE TO MOST.

AT LAST, THROUGH A CURTAIN AND UNDERLIT HALLWAY, HE ENTERS HIS PRIVATE CONFINES.

COME ON! COME ON!

OH YES. DO IT!

DO IT TO ME GOOD!

I PLAN TO.

THE NOISES CREATED BY THE WRESTLERS PURPOSELY MASK THE ACTIVITIES OF THOSE HIDDEN BEHIND THESE WALLS.

MUFFLING THEIR PLEASURE...

AND PAIN.

TWISTED IN BETWEEN PURGATORY AND LIMBO IS THE VAST WASTELAND OF HELL'S EIGHTH LEVEL. THE SHADOW OF THIS BLACK VOID CREEPS FAR CLOSER TO THE EARTHLY REALM THAN WE CARE TO THINK ABOUT.

IT'S HERE THAT THE ARMIES OF THE DAMNED ARE ASSEMBLED AND TRAINED, AWAITING THE SIGNAL TO BEGIN THE GLORIOUS WAR AGAINST THE HEAVENS: **ARMAGEDDON.**

THAT EVENTUAL WAR IS THE ONLY PURPOSE FOR THIS CREATURE, **THE MALEBOLGIA,** ONE OF THE HIGH-RANKING DEVILS. HE OVERSEES THE SWELLING SEA OF TROOPS, AND OCCASIONALLY CHOOSES OFFICERS TO LEAD THEM.

HIS LATEST HELLSPAWN-IN-TRAINING IS COMING ALONG AS PLANNED.

Delude yourself all you wish, Simmons, but you cannot run away from yourself.

There is a **reason** you were chosen from among the tortured millions.

Death. Evil. Blackness. Those seeds were planted in you at birth.

Soon. Very soon. All shall come to fruition.

THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA INTENSIFIES AS NEITHER BOSNIAN DIPLOMATS NOR THEIR SERBIAN COUNTERPARTS SEEM WILLING TO RESUME PEACEKEEPING TALKS. THE PRESIDENT'S MUCH-PUBLICIZED VISIT TO BOSNIA WAS CUT UNEXPECTEDLY SHORT, THREE FEWER DAYS THAN PLANNED, AFTER THE BOSNIAN PRESIDENT WALKED OUT DURING OUR PRESIDENT'S PRESENTATION REGARDING THE ONGOING BORDER DISPUTE. CITING FAVORITISM TOWARD THE SERBS, THE BOSNIAN PRESIDENT ADVISED THE COMMITTEE THAT BOSNIAN PARTICIATION WOULD RESUME ONLY IF THE U.S. PRESIDENT WAS REMOVED FROM THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. CLOSER TO HOME, POLICE IN NEW YORK CITY ARE STILL INVESTIGATING A GRUESOME MURDER IN THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT. THERE ARE NO REPORTED SUSPECTS AT THIS TIME.

AS THE INTERMINABLE DRUG WAR IN NEW YORK CITY ESCALATES, ANOTHER PAWN FALLS, VICTIM TO A ***GRUESOME*** ATTACK IN A PORN THEATER. POLICE HAD TO RESORT TO DENTAL RECORDS IN AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY THE BODY. SOURCES INDICATE THAT THE VICTIM HAD OVER A ***DOZEN*** BROKEN BONES. A BLOOD SPATTER EXPERT BEGINS HIS INVESTIGATION TODAY IN AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE WHAT, IF ***ANY,*** WEAPON WAS USED TO SEVER THE VICTIM'S HEAD. OFFICIALS ARE BAFFLED BY THE EXTENT OF THE MUTILATION, AND CANNOT DETERMINE IF THE ATTACK WAS COMMITTED BY A HUMAN OR SOME WILD ANIMAL. EVEN THOUGH THE RECENT ***VAMPIRE*** CASE HAS BEEN CLOSED, POLICE ARE NOT RULING OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONNECTION. IS THIS JUST ANOTHER MEANINGLESS CRIME, OR A REVENGE HIT FOR A DRUG DEAL GONE BAD? BEFORE A MOTIVE CAN BE SUGGESTED, POLICE SAY THE VICTIM'S IDENTITY MUST FIRST BE DETERIMINED. CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE. SOUNDS FAIR TO ME.

BIG SURPRISE. OUR OVERWHELMINGLY ELECTED PRESIDENT HAS PUT HIS FOOT IN HIS MOUTH ONCE AGAIN, THIS TIME AS HIS PROPOSAL FOR ENDING THE BOSNIAN CONFLICT WENT OVER LIKE A LEAD BALLOON. THE PRESIDENT IS WASTING OUR VALUABLE TIME TRYING TO MAKE HIS MARK IN HISTORY. I GUESS HE'S NOT PLANNING ON RETURNING FOR ANOTHER FOUR YEARS, SO THIS WOULD BE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY. INSTEAD OF GETTING THE JOB DONE, AS ***THIS*** CITIZEN WOULD LIKE TO DO, HE PUSSY-FOOTS AROUND THE ISSUE, ACCOMPLISHING ***NOTHING.*** BACK AT HOME, WE KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH SIMILAR PROBLEMS. FOR INSTANCE, LAST NIGHT'S GRUESOME MURDER IN NEW YORK. OBVIOUSLY THIS GUY, ANOTHER DRUG-PUSHING PUNK OR MAFIA THUG, GOT WHAT WAS ***COMING*** TO HIM. HE SCREWED SOMEONE OVER AND PAID THE PRICE. SHORT, SWEET, AND TO THE POINT. THE PRESIDENT COULD ***LEARN*** SOMETHING FROM THIS.

AT 2 A.M., INTELLIGENCE DIRECTOR JASON WYNN HAD ASSUMED HE'D BE ABLE TO GET IN ANOTHER PRODUCTIVE ALL-NIGHTER.

MANIPULATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY MISSIONS IS BEST DONE FAR FROM THE LIGHT OF DAY.

WHO DARES!

Awww... DECEPTION AND DECEIT. GIVES ME A WARM, *SQUISHY* FEELING.

DOESN'T MATTER.

WHAT *DOES* IS THAT YOU'LL BE WORKING FOR *ME*, STARTING *TODAY*.

AND I'M HOPING IT'LL BE *PERMANENT*.

YOU SEE, I'VE DONE MY *HOMEWORK* ON YOU, JASON MY BOY. YOU'RE PERFECT FOR *MY* NEEDS AND WHETHER YOU KNOW IT OR *NOT*, WE HAVE A FEW COMMON ENEMIES.

SO, ARE YOU IN OR WHAT? THOUGH, COME TO *THINK* OF IT, YOU DON'T HAVE A *CHOICE*.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU GOT PAST SECURITY BUT YOU'VE JUST MADE A *FATAL* MISTAKE!

FORGET ABOUT THE PHONES. THEY'RE DEAD.

COMBINE THAT WITH TERRY FITZ-GERALD. POLICE CHIEF BANKS. BILLY KINCAID. ET CETERA, ET CETERA, AND I THINK YOU GET MY *DRIFT*.

I'M LISTENING.

BUT THAT'S *YOUR* PROBLEM.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, YOU HAVE A THORN IN YOUR SIDE NAMED *SPAWN*.

GOOD.

Oh. YOUR OFFICE CAMERA SURVEILLANCE. YOUR DOUGHNUT-EATING RENT-A-COPS ARE SEEING A PERFECTLY NORMAL PICTURE. YOU ALONE. ALL BY YOURSELF. ANY OTHER SECURITY INDICATORS WILL ALSO BE BE BLIND TO MY PRESENCE.

IT'S JUST A LITTLE MAGIC THING I DO.

YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.

TRY ME. YOU'LL BE SURPRISED.

I'M HOPING.

SO HERE'S THE *GIG:*

OUR BUDDY SPAWN, I NEED HIM WEAK. ***SUSCEPTIBLE.*** ***RIPE,*** IF YOU WILL, FOR THE ***KILL.*** BUT WE CAN'T DO IT HANDS-ON.

THIS HAS ***GOT*** TO BE A STRICTLY ***LONG DISTANCE*** BRAIN SCREW. BECAUSE RIGHT NOW HIS SUIT OF ARMOR HAS ***ADVANCED*** TOO MUCH. REALLY PISSES ME ***OFF!***

SO I NEED SOME ***ASSISTANCE.*** WHICH IS WHERE ***YOU*** COME IN.

I'M ***FAMILIAR*** WITH MOST OF YOUR PAST ACTIVITIES. QUITE IMPRESSIVE, REALLY. KILLING. MAIMING. SPYING. WARRING. ***ALL THE GOOD STUFF!***

BUT ***I*** CAN OFFER WHAT IT IS YOU'RE ***REALLY*** THIRSTING FOR: **POWER!** -- NO MORE PANDERING TO THE PRESIDENT..

HIM AND HIS ADMINISTRATION ARE DUMBER THAN A SACK OF ***HAMMERS***. THEY DON'T HAVE A ***CLUE*** ABOUT YOUR SECRET AGENDA

LIKE THIS FILE... hmmm...

NAUGHTY, ***NAUGHTY*** LITTLE BOY. A FULL-SCALE ***AIR SWEEP*** OF A 'FRIENDLY' ARMY, ENGINEERED BY ONE OF AMERICA'S ENEMIES. IN RETURN, THEY GET A SECRET LINE OF CREDIT WITH A STRUGGLING ***DEFENSE CONTRACTOR***.

THEY GET TO CONTINUE THEIR WARS AGAINST YOUR ALLIES-- YOUR INTELLIGENCE AGENCY'S MORE ESSENTIAL THAN ***EVER***--

--AND ***YOU*** COME OUT WITH TWELVE MILLION BUCKS OF LAUNDERED KICKBACKS IN YOUR SWISS ACCOUNT.

GET TO YOUR POINT.

TERRY FITZGERALD. I SEE BY THIS OTHER FILE THAT HE RECENTLY TRANSFERRED TO YOUR OFFICE.

PERFECT. IT'LL MAKE THINGS EASIER. I WANT YOU TO ***BEFRIEND*** HIM. GAIN HIS ***CONFIDENCE***...

...WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DO A NUMBER ON THOSE HE ***CARES*** ABOUT. A SORT OF ***JEKYLL-AND-HYDE*** THING.

THAT MEANS HIS WIFE. KID. GRANNIE. WHOEVER. PUSH THEM. ***HARD!***

IT'LL DRIVE OLD SPAWNIE SIMPLY BATTY! -WHICH IS A ***GOOD*** THING.

AND WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT I'LL LET YOU ***IN*** ON SOMETHING.

LIKE WHO OUR HERO REALLY ***IS***.

IT'S GOING TO GIVE YOU A HEART ATTACK. PROMISE!

HIS TESTS HAVE ALL COME UP NEGATIVE. THE INJURIES ARE HEALING SATISFACTORILY. HIS RECOVERY IS ON TARGET.

THOK

WHOA MAMA!

WHAT HAVE WE GOT *HERE?*

OKAY, BURKE, TRY THIS NICE AND EASY.

X-RAYS
RADIOLOGY
B-WING

Coffee

GOOD DAY, MISS. I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE THAT ATTRACTIVE BREAST... I MEAN... *DRESS* YOU'RE WEARING, AND WAS WONDERING IF...

SORRY, BUT I'M ON MY WAY TO SEE SOMEBODY. HAVE A NICE DAY.

THOK

Uh, SURE. BE SEEING YOU AROUND.

-RAYS
IOLO
WIN

WOW!

THOK

BUDDY! I'VE JUST SEEN THE 8th WONDER OF THE WORLD! CURVES LIKE A RACETRACK I COULD RUN MY HANDS ALL OVER FOR DAYS!

HELLO, SIR.

AND DID SHE HAVE A PAIR OF...

Oops.

Y'KNOW, I DON'T THINK YOU'VE EVER MET MY WIFE, HELEN.

HELLO. IT'S NICE TO FINALLY MEET YOU.

YUM

YoYo

Hee-HAW!

UNFORTUNATELY, I'M LATE PICKING UP TRUDY FROM SCHOOL. YOU TAKE IT EASY, DARLING. TRY AND GET SOME REST.

I'M SUCH AN

SHE'S A CLASSY, BEAUTIFUL GAL, TWITCH. YOU'RE VERY LUCKY.

THANK YOU, SIR. SO, ANY-THING NEW TO REPORT ON CHIEF BANKS?

YEAH. I WAS ABLE TO GET MY HANDS ON HIS PHONE RECORDS-- AND EVER SINCE HE RECEIVED OUR NOTE,* HE'S BEEN MAKING A LOT OF CALLS TO A CONFIDENTIAL NUMBER AT C.I.A. HEAD-QUARTERS.

HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT WHO'D EVEN GIVE BANKS THE TIME OF DAY THERE, BUT JUDGING FROM THE HOURS WHEN HE'S CALLING, HE DOESN'T WANT THAT MANY PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT IT.

*ISSUE 31--Tom-

JASON WYNN'S BEEN MULLING OVER THE DWARFISH CLOWN'S VISIT FOR THE PAST 20 HOURS. THE PEST KNEW TOO MUCH. THE PROPOSAL MADE SENSE... THOUGH IT WOULD BACK HIM INTO A CORNER. DAMN.

BRRING

MR. WYNN. THE PRESIDENT IS ON LINE ONE.

MR. PRESIDENT?

AFTERNOON, JASON. I WANT TO THANK YOU PERSONALLY FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN GETTING US OUT OF THAT LITTLE 'SITUATION' IN BOSNIA.

I'VE BEEN ADVISED THAT YOU SPEARHEADED THE RESOLUTION. I OWE YOU ONE. THANKS.

Uh... YOU'RE WELCOME, SIR...

?

WHAT MISSION? I DIDN'T SANCTION ANY...

BRRING

I TAKE IT YOU'VE HEARD FROM YOUR PAL. WELL, CONSIDER IT A LITTLE PREVIEW OF THINGS TO *COME*. A ***DOWN PAYMENT***, IF YOU WILL.

HOPE YOU'RE CLEAR ON THE SITUATION NOW. TOODLE-***OO***, BUDDY! SAY HELLO TO ***TERRY*** FOR ME...!

A PARTICULAR NEW YORK CITY ALLEY...

I DON'T KNOW WHAT VIOLATOR'S THINKING. ATTACK ME, THEN JUST DISAPPEAR? DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.

OH, NO? THEN YOU'RE NOT PAYING ATTENTION.

MEANING?

I'M NOT LIKE HIM!

REALLY? YOUR LATEST ACTIONS SAY OTHER-WISE.

STINKY WAS PREYING ON CHILDREN. TURNING THEM INTO HIS OWN KIND. I JUST SENT OUT A LOUD MESSAGE TO OTHERS LIKE HIM.

PRECISELY.

AND THAT MEANT USING YOUR TRAINING. HE DIDN'T STAND A *CHANCE* AGAINST YOU, AL.

HE'S TRYING TO CONFUSE YOU. KEEP YOU ***DISTRAC-TED.*** AND WHEN HE DOES THAT, YOUR ***INSTINCTS*** TAKE OVER... WHICH IS WHAT HE ***WANTS.***

YOU SEE, YOU AND HE ARE TWO PEAS IN A *POD* ON SOME LEVELS.

CAN'T YOU SEE, HELL ***WANTS*** YOU TO ACT LIKE THIS.

IN SOME CASES, THEY'RE RIGHT.

DAMN YOU, AL! YOU'RE MAKING THIS *TOO* EASY FOR THEM.

HERE, LET ME ENLIGHTEN YOU A BIT. THAT LITTLE BOY *TYRONE* YOU WERE SO CONCERNED ABOUT--HE *RUNS* THOSE STREETS IN HIS NEIGHBORHOOD. HE'S BEEN IN AND OUT OF DETENSION HALLS SINCE HE WAS *SIX*. BEEN SELLING GUNS SINCE *SEVEN*.

HE WAS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN TWO *MURDERS*, BUT HIS AGE ALLOWED HIM TO CIRCUMVENT ANY SEVERE PUNISHMENT.

AND HE WASN'T BEING STRONGARMED BY STINKY. JUST THE *OPPOSITE*. THE BOY'S DRUG BUSINESS HAS BEEN SLIPPING. HE WAS JUST LOOKING AT SOME NEW SAMPLES.

YOUR SOLUTION TO ALL THIS? KILL WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. LET YOUR *IGNORANCE* RULE THOSE GOVERNMENT-TRAINED HOMICIDAL INSTINCTS.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME ANYWAYS, COG?

FOR YOU TO *FOCUS!* --USE YOUR POWER WISELY. LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU WERE ASSASSINATED UNDER ORDERS.

AND- STOP THE DENIALS. WHAT YOU WERE IS STILL A PART OF YOU. HELL MEANS TO *EXPLOIT* THAT.

THIS ISN'T HOW IT WAS SUPPOSED TO TURN OUT.

I KNOW.

BUT IT'S STILL YOUR PROBLEM.

6:8:8:7

"BECAUSE, LIKE IT OR NOT, THERE IS A HOST OF OTHERS TANGLED IN YOUR WEB. IGNORING THEM WOULD WEAVE A LIFE WITHOUT PURPOSE.

"YOUR FRIENDS... LOVED ONES... WOULD FALL PREY TO MUCH EVIL."

AS THE DAY COMES TO A CLOSE TERRY FITZ-GERALD FINDS HIM-SELF ALONE AT HIS NEW OFFICE AT C I A HEAD-QUARTERS.

FINALLY, HE HAS A CHANCE TO PURSUE HIS ONLY REASON FOR REQUESTING A TRANSFER TO JASON WYNN'S DEPARTMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE:

FINDING OUT WHAT HIS NEW DEPARTMENT HEAD IS REALLY UP TO.

THE GUY IS SLICK. RETRACING HIS TRACKS WON'T BE EASY, ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE SECURITY CHECKS IN-VOLVED. BUT THERE HAS TO BE *SOME*THING HERE I CAN USE.

HIS INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES LOOK CLEAN. *ALMOST* TOO CLEAN.

THEN, A NOISE BEHIND HIM SNAPS TERRY BACK TO ATTENTION.

Ah-- THERE YOU ARE.

um... YES, SIR, I WAS JUST FINISHING UP... uh...

MORE WORK? I'VE BEEN HEARING HOW HARD YOU'VE PUSHED YOURSELF IN SUCH A SHORT TIME. YOUR REPORTS ARE *VERY* THOROUGH.

AND SYSTEMS ANALYSIS SAYS YOU HELPED MODIFY AN ENCRYPTED ACCESS ROUTE FOR OUR FIELD OPS.

IT'S MUCH APPRECIATED.

THANK YOU, SIR.

THERE'S ONE OTHER THING.

SOMEONE WITHIN THIS ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN PURSUING NON-SANCTIONED ACTIVITIES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CONSTRUCTING A PAPER TRAIL POINTED IN MY DIRECTION.

I'D LIKE YOU TO HELP ME UNCOVER THIS IT'D GET SOME PRESSURE OFF MY BACK AND I'D BE INDEBTED TO YOU.

SINCE YOU'RE NEW, MY CYNICAL MINDSET TELLS ME I CAN TRUST YOU MORE THAN THE OTHERS RIGHT NOW.

TO BE CONTINUED

EARLY DURING HIS RECOVERY, THERE HAD BEEN A FEW SCARY REPORTS THAT HAD HIS FELLOW POLICEMEN SAYING PRAYERS. BUT NOW, EXCEPT FOR A SLIGHT LIMP AND THE SLING CRADLING A FRACTURED ELBOW, DETECTIVE **'TWITCH' WILLIAMS** APPEARS READY TO RETURN TO THE FORCE.

HARDEST HIT BY TWITCH'S ABSENCE WAS HIS PARTNER, **SAM BURKE**. NORMALLY A PILLAR OF UNWAVERING STRENGTH, SAM HAS BEEN HALF-HEARTEDLY WADING THROUGH HIS CASE FILES FOR WEEKS (EXCEPT FOR THAT ONE PERSONAL CASE).

NOW REUNITED, THE LAUREL-AND-HARDY DUO ARE ONCE AGAIN LIKE TWO LITTLE KIDS AT SUMMER CAMP.

WELCOME BACK TWITCH

I *SWEAR*, TWITCH. I HAD *NOTHING* TO DO WITH THIS. THE GUYS DID IT ON THEIR OWN.

SURE. SURE WHATEVER YOU *SAY*, SIR.

C'MON. D'YOU THINK *I'D* BE ABLE TO PLAN SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

THE *FIVE DOZEN* JELLY-FILLED *MEGA-DOUGHNUTS* ARE A *COINCIDENCE?*

SO I HAD A LITTLE INPUT.

HE'S RIGHT, TWITCH. WE DID THIS OURSELVES. WE JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW WE'RE BEHIND YOU, BUDDY.

FOR TWITCH, WHO HAD BEEN ANXIOUS TO RETURN TO WORK FOR DAYS, ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES OF SOCIALIZING SEEMED AN ETERNITY. ONE CASE IN PARTICULAR WAS GNAWING AWAY AT HIM.

NICE TO HAVE YOU BACK, LT. WILLIAMS. YOUR PRESENCE WAS GREATLY MISSED BY US ALL.

THANK YOU, CHIEF BANKS. I APPRECIATE THE KIND WORDS.

WITH A SUBTLE WINK TO BURKE, TWITCH LETS HIS PARTNER KNOW THAT IT'S TIME TO GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.

HOW LOVELY.

YOUR SINCERITY IS OVER*WHELM*ING. A MAN GETS RIPPED *APART** AND *THAT'S* ALL THE SYMPATHY YOU CAN MUSTER?

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING ON THAT FEEBLE MIND OF YOURS THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY?

* BLOODFEUD MINISERIES, #3-- Tom.

I'VE *PLENTY* TO SAY... *SIR!*

THEN BE A *MAN* ABOUT IT, AND SAY IT TO MY *FACE.*

Oh, I *WILL! BELIEVE* ME, I WILL. YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO BE A BIT MORE *PATIENT.* YOUR TIME IS COMING.

IS THAT A THREAT?

YOU CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT. NOW, EXCUSE ME. SOME OF US LIKE TO *WORK* AROUND HERE.

SLAM

TROUBLE?

CAN'T TELL.

WELL, THE WORD IS BURKE'S BEEN SNIFFING AROUND LATELY, MOSTLY IN *YOUR* DIRECTION. HEARD HE EVEN GOT SOME OF YOUR PHONE RECORDS.

YOU MIGHT WANT TO WATCH YOUR BACK.

THANKS, ERIC. THAT'S *VERY* USEFUL INFO.

SORRY, TWITCH.

WHAT FOR, SIR?

I STILL HAVEN'T NAILED DOWN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BANKS AND THAT KID-KILLER *KINCAID*. IT'S THERE. I KNOW IT. I JUST KEEP HOPING THAT IF I PRESSURE HIM HE'LL EVENTUALLY CRACK.

THAT YOU STAYED ON THIS CASE IN MY ABSENCE MEANS A LOT TO ME, SIR.

I'M SURE IT'S BEEN A TON OF WORK DOING IT ALONE.

"--WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THEY'RE AFRAID? OF WHAT?"

"YOU...

"YOUR POTENTIAL, TO BE EXACT.

"THE TRADITION OF THE SPAWN IS A VERY SORDID STORY, AL.

"EACH OF THE SPAWN CAME THROUGH THEIR BAPTISM OF FIRE WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS.

"SOME FOUGHT THEIR NEW STATUS. SOME ACCEPTED IT, ***TOO*** WILLINGLY. BUT NONE WERE EVER ABLE TO ***REVERSE*** THE SITUATION.

"I GUARANTEE THEY'LL NOT LET ***YOU*** BE THE FIRST."

"YOU KNOW WHAT, COG, I DON'T GIVE A ***CRAP*** WHAT THEY HAD PLANNED FOR ME. **NO ONE'S** GOING TO DICTATE WHAT I DO

"UNFORTUNATELY, AL, THEY ALREADY ***HAVE.*** MEANWHILE, YOU'VE LEARNED HOW TO DEAL WITH THE ***COST*** OF USING YOUR POWERS...

"...HOW TO ***KILL*** MORE EFFICIENTLY... AND HOW TO IGNORE THE ***CONSEQUENCES.***"

EACH BEING A POSITIVE IN YOUR TRAINING HERE ON EARTH.

BUT NOW THERE IS AN X-FACTOR THEY'VE NEVER DEALT WITH BEFORE, WHICH MAKES YOU *DANGER-OUS* TO THEM.

YOUR *UNIFORM.*

WHAT?

I'M SURE BY NOW YOU'VE SEEN *AND* FELT THE TRANSFORMATION OF YOUR OUTFIT. THAT SHOULDN'T HAVE *HAPPENED...* AT LEAST NOT *YET.*

IT *SHOULD* HAVE BEEN ANOTHER SEVEN *YEARS.*

OLD MAN, BESIDES BEING **CRAZY**, YOU HAVEN'T A **CLUE** HOW...

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? THAT I'M SOME SUPER-SPAWN?

I DON'T KNOW. ***NONE*** OF US DO. BUT THE ANSWERS LIE WITHIN YOU. SEARCH THEM OUT.

USE THE COSTUME TO YOUR ADVANTAGE... ***NOT*** THEIRS.

DON'T I?

THEN, EVERYTHING BECOMES BOTH HELLISH AND FAMILIAR AS SPAWN'S BRAIN IS SEARED BY A KALEIDOSCOPIC ARRAY OF IMAGES.

SCATTERED FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST FLASH HELTER-SKELTER. SOME THEN ARRANGE IN SHARP FOCUS.

THEY PIVOT AROUND THE HUMAN NIGHTMARE WHO WAS HIS BOSS. AL'S STRONG WILL COLLIDED WITH THAT OF HIS SUPERIOR... TOO OFTEN FOR EITHER OF THEM TO TOLERATE.

THE MAN, BLINDED BY HIS LUST FOR POWER, DEMANDED TO BE IN ULTIMATE CONTROL... THAT HIS WHIM DETERMINE THE FATE OF **ALL** SITUATIONS. ALL **PARTICIPANTS.**

HE GAVE THE ORDERS.

HE SANCTIONED THE KILLS, THE KILLERS...

HE CONTROLLED **CHAPEL.**

WHEN AL BECAME A BOTHER, HE WAS ELIMINATED. FOR THIS MAN, THIS DEVIL, ALWAYS HAD TO **WIN.**

WYNN!

DAMN YOU.

A HEARTBEAT LATER, THE IMAGES RETREAT. SPAWN IS UNSETTLED, BUT HIS NEURAL PARASITE COSTUME IS **INVIGORATED.** THE SYMBIOTIC LIVERY, THRIVING ON THE SENSORY INPUT, IS PUMPED AND READY FOR ITS NEXT CHALLENGE.

ITS HOST IS THOROUGHLY **WIPED.**

YOU OKAY?

FINE.

THEN IT'S TIME YOU BEGAN. YOUR MISSION SHOULD BE CLEAR.

JASON WYNN'S OFFICE, AT THE C.I.A. ...

AS I'VE BEEN SAYING, FITZGERALD, SECURITY HAS BEEN BREACHED RECENTLY.

I'D LIKE YOU TO HEAD UP THE REORGANIZATION OF OUR DATA SECURITY SYSTEMS. THE AGENCY MUST NOT BE COMPROMISED AGAIN. UNDERSTOOD?

YES, SIR.

AS THE WEEK GOES ON, JASON ATTENDS TO OTHER ANNOYING MATTERS.

I'M SLOWLY LOSING PATIENCE, BANKS. TELL ME AGAIN, WITHOUT LAPSING INTO PARANOIA, HOW ONE OF YOUR SUBORDINATES COULD POSSIBLY KNOW OF KINCAID.

I DON'T ***KNOW.*** HE JUST ***DOES.*** HE ***HAS*** TO BE THE ONE WHO GAVE ME THE NOTE.

SINCE ***YOU*** RECEIVED A FILE ***TOO,*** BURKE MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO IMPLICATE YOU AS ***WELL.***

FOOL! NO MERE DETECTIVE ACCUMULATED THIS INFORMATION. HE WOULD'VE HAD NO WAY TO GAIN ACCESS.

BESIDES, YOUR MASKED VIGILANTE, SPAWN, DELIVERED MINE ***PERSONALLY.****

SPAWN?

* ISSUE #24 --Tom.

WHAT DOES HE HAVE TO DO WITH BURKE?

YOU DISAPPOINT ME, BANKS. YOUR OFFICER IS SOME SORT OF ***DIVERSION.*** OUR ***HEADACHE*** IS SITTING IN YOUR ***BACK YARD.*** I SUGGEST YOU ACT RATHER SWIFTLY ON THIS.

I WILL NOW. YOU CAN ***COUNT*** ON ME.

NOT ***SO*** FAR.

CLICK

POLICE CHIEF LOUIS BANKS KNOWS THE CONSEQUENCE OF FAILING A MAN LIKE WYNN.

YES-- SHE SURE *IS* A BIG GIRL. Y'KNOW, YESTERDAY, CYAN SAID "GRANDMA" FOR THE FIRST TIME.

GAN-MA.

LET ME THINK, WHAT ELSE. TERRY'S STILL WORKING LONG HOURS AT HIS NEW JOB...

CRAYONS

... AND THINGS ARE COMING TOGETHER AT THE SHELTER. WE JUST RECEIVED A *HUGE* ANONYMOUS DONATION.

Oh, WANDA. THAT'S WONDER-FUL.

WELL, *I'VE* GOT SOME GOOD NEWS, TOO.

YOU KNOW THAT PROBLEM I'VE BEEN HAVING WITH JONATHAN'S GOVERN-MENT *PENSION.* WELL, I JUST RECEIVED A SPECIAL DELIVERY TODAY SAYING THE PAYMENTS WILL CON-TINUE AS SCHEDULED, AND THAT THE I.R.S. HAS CLOSED THE FILE.

THEY ALSO *APOLOGIZED* FOR ANY *INCONVENIENCE* THEY'VE CAUSED ME!

IT'S *SUCH* A BREATH OF FRESH AIR. I WAS SO WORRIED I MIGHT HAVE TO SELL THE *HOUSE.*

LIKE A LONG SHADOW, WYNN'S PRESENCE CREEPS INTO THE LIVES OF TERRY AND HIS FAMILY.

NEW YORK CITY'S 12th PRECINCT.

BURKE!

POLICE

I JUST HEARD THAT BANKS AND A COUPLE OF HIS ASS-KISSERS JUST TOOK OFF TO THE *ALLEYS*. HE WAS GOING OFF THE DEEP END ABOUT THAT VIGILANTE, *SPAWN*.

DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S ABOUT, BUT SEEING THAT IT'S *YOUR* CASE...

THANKS, BOB.

GUN POLISH

GRIPES!

THAT IDIOT BANKS. HE'S GONNA GET HIS THROAT SLIT.

HE'S SUPPOSED TO KEEP *OUT* OF THE ALLEYS.

WE NEVER GAVE HIM *SPAWN'S* FILE.

HE HAS NO *IDEA* WHAT HE'S WALKING INTO.

I'VE *GOT* TO GET TO HIM BEFORE SPAWN DOES.

YOU COMING?

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY, SIR.

DON'T EXPECT ME TO WAIT FOR YOU.

THANKS FOR CARING, SIR.

ELSEWHERE...

JENSEN, PULL UP OVER THERE.

EVENING, GENTLEMEN. I'D LIKE A FEW MOMENTS OF YOUR TIME.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR A MAN WHO GOES BY THE NAME OF '*SPAWN*.'

NEED TO ASK A FEW QUESTIONS.

DON'T KNOW ABOUT ANY *PRAWNS*.

"UNFTK"

WE SAID *SPAWN*, WISE GUY! HE'S BEEN FAIRLY *ACTIVE* IN THIS AREA. THOUGHT WE MIGHT HAVE A *CHAT* WITH THE BOY.

THAT'S ENOUGH, JENSEN. I'M SURE WE'VE MADE OUR POINT.

WE CAN CONTINUE ON OUR OWN NOW.

YOU *PUKES!* GOING TO KICK SOME PUPPIES, *TOO?*

SCREW OFF.

PLEASE. LET'S NOT LOWER OUR-SELVES.

AS THE OFFICERS MELT INTO THE ALLEY'S SHADOWS, ONE OF THE HOMELESS STANDS TRANSFIXED.

DARK EMOTION BEGINS TO BOIL.

*IN LIFE, AS A C.I.A.-TRAINED **ASSASSIN**, **AL SIMMONS** LIVED FOR THESE MOMENTS.*

*THEY'RE WHAT GAVE HIM A PURPOSE. WHAT MADE HIM **WHOLE.***

*AND THOUGH HE REALIZES THIS IS A DISTRACTION FROM HIS MAIN TARGET, JASON WYNN, IT SHOULD SERVE QUITE NICELY AS A **WARM-UP.***

THEN WE'LL SPEND *ANOTHER* HOUR UNTIL WE...

?

DOESN'T LOOK GOOD, CHIEF. IT'S BEEN AN HOUR AND WE AIN'T SEEN NOTHING.

BANKS SPOTS A MAKESHIFT FENCE WHERE THERE SHOULDN'T BE ONE.

POLICE

KR ASH!

*THEN, A TWO-BLOCK WALK THROUGH NEAR-DARKNESS BRINGS THEM TO A **DEAD END.***

JEEZ.

WELL, *WELL.* LOOKS LIKE WE FOUND OUR FRIEND'S LITTLE *HIDEOUT.*

GET A LOAD OF *THAT.*

IT'S SOME KIND OF *THRONE.*

MY GOD. THEY THINK HE'S SOME KIND OF KING.

ARE *THEY* TWISTED.

NO. JUST THANKFUL.

FOR CHRISSAKES! HOW'D YOU--?! WH-WHERE'S JENSEN? SMITH?

ALIVE. THAT'S ENOUGH.

I TOLD YOU TO STAY **AWAY** FROM ME-- YOU AND YOUR MEN.

DIDN'T THE **FILE** MEAN ANY-THING? ARE YOU **THAT** SUICIDAL?

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE *TALKING* ABOUT.

I THOUGHT YOU AND *BURKE* WERE...

FREEZE!

THE FILE.

YOU DIDN'T DELIVER IT. WHY?

TOO MUCH INTERESTING CRAP IN IT. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, *CHIEF*?

LIKE STUFF ABOUT YOUR BUDDY KINCAID. *

* ISSUE 5.--Tom.

KINCAID!

STOP IT, SPAWN!

YOU *BOTH* HAVE A LOT TO ANSWER FOR.

STOP IT!

IT WAS WYNN.

TELL ME. NOW!

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO DO WITH THAT BUTCHER?!

WHAT'D HE SAY?

HE *WHISPERED* SOMETHING.

SPAWN SAYS NOTHING. YET AGAIN HE'S BEEN REMINDED WHO THE TRUE ENEMY IS.

OKAY, TOUGH GUY. I'M GOING TO HAVE TO DRAG ***BOTH*** YOUR BUTTS DOWNTOWN.

I KNOW THAT.

WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS BEFORE. * YOUR GUNS CAN'T HURT ME.

BUT LET'S JUST SEE HOW FAST YOU REGENERATE YOUR HEAD AFTER I ***BLOW IT OFF YOUR SHOULDERS.***

KIND OF DIFFICULT TO ***RUN AWAY*** WITH NO ***EYEBALLS.***

*ISSUE #23 -- Tom.

SPAWN HADN'T CONSIDERED THAT SCENARIO.

SKAK

KTAK

BUT, BEFORE EITHER DETECTIVE HAS A CHANCE TO DEFEND AGAINST THE COSTUME, IT AND ITS BEARER ARE GONE.

CRIPES!

THE MOMENTS HAVE BECOME HARDER TO FIND, BUT TODAY WANDA, TERRY AND THEIR DAUGHTER CYAN ARE QUIETLY BEING A FAMILY TOGETHER.

I'M JUST GETTING MORE CONFUSED BY IT ALL.

NOW THAT WYNN'S BROUGHT ME INTO HIS INNER CIRCLE, I CAN FIND OUT IF HE SUSPECTS ME OF SOMETHING... *OR* IF HE'S TELLING THE *TRUTH*, THAT HE'S BEING *SET UP*.

EITHER WAY, I'M SCREWED

NO, DA-DA! *NO!* giggle! giggle!

YOU'RE RIGHT. IF SOMEONE'S POINTING ALL THE INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE HIS WAY, WE'RE BACK TO SQUARE ONE-- UNLESS WYNN CAN HELP US.

BUT IF HE'S *LYING*...

WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LET HIM KNOW WHAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING BEHIND HIS BACK. WHICH MAKES HIS FRIENDLINESS TOWARD YOU EVEN CREEPIER.

IT SEEMS LIKE WE JUST KEEP HITTING WALLS.

MEANWHILE, I GOT SOME GOOD NEWS TODAY. WE JUST RECEIVED A *HUGE* ANONYMOUS DONATION AT THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY. LARGER THAN I COULD EVER IMAGINE. IT LOOKS LIKE WE'LL FINALLY BE ABLE TO START THAT URGENT CARE WARD AT THE HOSPITAL.

ONLY $19

AFTER EVERYONE'S HARD WORK, THIS IS A GODSEND FOR THE CENTER.

THAT'S FANTASTIC!

YOU'VE DONE A *GREAT* JOB, SWEETHEART. I DON'T SAY THAT ENOUGH. I'M PROUD OF HOW YOU HANDLED EVERYTHING.

HOPEFULLY, THAT DONATION IS JUST THE START OF MORE GOOD THINGS.

UNBEKNOWNST TO BOTH, THE BENEFACTOR WITH A HEART OF GOLD IS WYNN HIMSELF.

ALONG WITH THE CHECK, THIS PERSON ENCLOSED A NOTE EXPRESSING HIS LOVE FOR ALL CHILDREN, AND ADDING THAT HE HAS NONE OF HIS OWN.

MORE, DAD-DA! *MORE!*

OKAY, KIDDO. STOP SQUIRMING. YOU'RE GOING TO *KICK...*

TERRY! Um... CHUCKLE

...YOU OKAY?!

CYAN! LOOK WHAT YOU DID. NOW YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO HAVE ANY BROTHERS OR SISTERS!

VERY FUNNY.

...SOME-THING.

UG.

AGAIN! ME DO AGAIN.

A CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

HELLO, JASON.

WHAT DO YOU WANT!

EVERYTHING! MY WIFE. MY LIFE. NORMALITY.

WHAT ARE YOU?

EXACTLY WHAT YOU MADE ME... NOTHING!

YOU SEE, I'M HERE TO EVEN A SCORE.

IT'S MY TURN TO KILL YOU.

BUT, BEFORE I SEND YOU TO HELL, I WANT TO KNOW WHY I WAS ELIMINATED!

YOU'RE INSANE.

KRAK!

WRONG ANSWER!

AND WHAT MAKES THIS EVEN MORE SICKENING IS THAT YOU STILL HAVEN'T A CLUE WHO I AM. THE POOL OF BLOOD YOU SWIM IN HAS DILUTED YOUR MEMORY.

YOU WON'T GET TEN FEET FROM HERE BEFORE YOU'RE A DEAD MAN.

SNAP!

WYNN'S ARM BREAKS LIKE A TWIG.

TIME YOU LEARNED SOMETHING:

THEY CAN'T KILL WHAT'S ALREADY DEAD!

SUDDENLY, THE DOORS ARE FORCED OPEN. A DOZEN HEAT-SENSOR A-K 50's ARE AIMED AT SPAWN'S TEMPLE.

TAKE A STEP BACK, SPAWN. NICE AND SLOW.

NO!

NOT YOU TOO, TERRY!

IS EVERYONE CONTROLLED BY THIS DEVIL?

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.

C.I.A.

NEXT ISSUE—

BETRAYAL AND PAIN

6:8:8:7

ISSUE 36

IT COULDN'T BE. NOT **THIS. NOT NOW.**

SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE DEAD, NOTHING HAS MADE MUCH SENSE. HIS TWISTED NEW EXISTENCE HAS CONTINUED TO UNRAVEL **CHAOTICALLY,** EACH DAY BRINGING **NEW** PAIN.

THOUGH ONLY A SPLIT-SECOND OF TIME FLASHED BETWEEN HIS DEATH AND INITIATION AS AN AGENT OF HELL, **FIVE YEARS** HAD SLIPPED AWAY ON EARTH. SO, THIS CREATURE ONCE KNOWN AS **LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS** WAS NOW DRIFTING EMOTIONALLY, LOST IN TIME.

HIS **WIFE**... REMARRIED... TO HIS **BEST FRIEND,** NO LESS. THEY HAVE A **CHILD**... SOMETHING **HE'D** BEEN INCAPABLE OF GIVING HER. **ALLIANCES** HAD CHANGED... AND HIS **IDENTITY** WAS NOW FOREVER **LOST,** EXCHANGED FOR AN UNHOLY **SHELL** OF **NECROPLASMIC GOO.**

HIS ONLY REFUGE HAS BEEN HIS PAST CAREER, THAT OF A COVERT **ASSASSIN** IN THE SERVICE OF U.S. INTELLIGENCE. RECENTLY-RECOVERED MEMORIES GAVE HIM THE FACE OF HIS **OWN** MURDERER. HE DECIDED THEN IT WAS TIME TO EXORCISE A FEW **INTERNAL** DEMONS --

-- BY **KILLING** HIS FORMER BOSS --

--**JASON WYNN**: THE MAN WHO GAVE THE **ORDER**. THE MAN WHO, IN A BIZARRE TWIST OF FATE, HAD A HAND IN **CREATING** THIS NEW HELLSPAWN.

HE HAD HOPED TO MAKE WYNN'S DEATH EXCRUCIATINGLY **SLOW.** REVENGE WAS ALL AL HAD LEFT. HE HAD HOPED IT WOULD BRING A MOMENTARY RESPITE FROM THIS NIGHTMARE.

BUT NOW, INSTEAD, THINGS HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE **UNBEARABLE.**

YOU **TRAITOR!**

FLANKED BY A DOZEN BIO-TECH SECURITY GUARDS, **TERRY FITZ-GERALD** STANDS DEFIANTLY IN WHAT LITTLE LIGHT THERE IS IN JASON WYNN'S C.I.A. OFFICE.

SHUT UP! YOU HAVEN'T THE *RIGHT* TO MAKE ACCUSA-TIONS!

NOW STAND BACK. SLOWLY. AND KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM.

KILLING HIM WON'T GIVE US ANY ANSWERS. HE'S MORE VALUABLE *ALIVE*.

THE SIGHT OF HIS BEST FRIEND PROTECTING WYNN SICKENS HIM. MAYBE HE SHOULD JUST KILL THEM BOTH, SPAWN THINKS. RIGHT HERE. RIGHT NOW.

*HE'S GOT THE POWER. WHY **NOT** USE IT TO BLAST THIS WHOLE FRIGGIN' FLOOR HALFWAY ACROSS THE CITY.*

DAMN YOU, FITZGERALD!

SHOOT *HIM!* THIS ISN'T A *NEGOTIATION!*

GUARDS! LISTEN UP! FITZGERALD IS HEREBY *RELIEVED* OF HIS COMMAND! *I'M* IN CHARGE NOW! SO *QUICKLY*-- BE-FORE HE ESCAPES INTO THE *SHADOWS*--

FIRE!

HURRY! THE LIGHTS-- TURN THEM ON! I DON'T WANT HIM IN THE *DARKNESS!*

THE FILE CABINET COMES FROM THE RIGHT, BLINDSIDING THE TROOPS.

ALREADY, SPAWN HAS MOVED, UNDETECTED.

DAMMIT! CALL FOR BACK-UPS. NOW! I WANT THIS ENTIRE FLOOR SECTIONED OFF. THIS BASTARD'S NOT LEAVING *ALIVE.*

WANNA BET?

HE'S ON THE LEFT NOW! WHAT'S HE, SOME KIND'A *GHOST*?!

HE'S MOVING TOO FAST. *WYNN!* GET OUT OF THE WAY!

TOO LATE.

I'LL BE **BACK** FOR YOU, TERRY.

LIKE A LEAD BALLOON, THEY FALL.

A JUTTING SECTION OF THE BUILDING RENDERS THAT EFFORT **USELESS.**

SENSING IMPENDING DISASTER, THE HELLSPAWN'S **CLOAK** ATTEMPTS TO FORM **WINGS.**

SCREAMING, THE CURRENT OCCUPANTS OF THE 17th FLOOR SCATTER. SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN ALERTED.

unng.

Uh?! NOT DEAD, YET? GOOD!!

I DIDN'T WANT YOUR PAIN TO END TOO QUICKLY.

WHO ARE YOU?!

SOME-ONE WHO GOT IN YOUR WAY.

WHO DIDN'T COUNT.

IN THERE! HURRY, PLEASE!

JUST STAY CALM.

DON'T MOVE! --BOTH OF YOU!

I'M JASON WYNN. SPECIAL SECURITY. SECTOR TWELVE. HE'S THE INTRUDER. GIVE ME YOUR GUN.

WHAT FOR?

I NEED A SACRIFICIAL PIG.

A BEAT LATER... OUTSIDE THE OFFICE...

HELP! THE CREATURE'S GONE *MAD!* HE'S *KILLED THE GUARD!*

THE TRAP SET, WYNN RETREATS.

TEAM RED...

THAT'S HIM. THE MURDERER!

"...THIS IS THE COMMANDER. INCREASE SUPPORT ABOVE AND BELOW. HE'S HEADED FOR STAIRWELL NINE.

EXIT

STAIRS

"I WANT ALL EXITS SECURED. NOW! BRING TEAM ORANGE INTO 'KILL' POSITION. HE'S GOT NOWHERE TO GO...

"...BUT *DOWN.*"

"*JEE*-ZUS! HE JUST JUMPED THE RAILS!"

"WE'RE *LOSING* HIM!"

SMASH

"HE'S HIT SOMETHING. AROUND THE TWELFTH FLOOR. I WANT THREE UNITS ON IT.

"BLOCK THE EXITS AND MONITOR THE ELEVATOR SHAFTS.

"THE WEST WING HAS BEEN SEALED FOR CONSTRUCTION. WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT WINDOWS OR ENCLOSED SPACES. HE'S HEADING INTO NO-MAN'S LAND."

"DAMMIT!"

"TAYLOR! WHAT'S GOING ON DOWN THERE?!"

STOP! YOU'RE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED. YOU HAVE THREE SECONDS TO...

"HE'S *OUT!* WENT THROUGH THE *WALL!*"

WHAT?!! GOD DAMMIT! WE DON'T HAVE OUTSIDE REINFORCEMENTS YET!

THEY'RE COMING.

WHERE'S HE NOW?

LANDED HARD, SOUTH, ON THE ROOF OF THE MERRILL LYNCH BUILDING.

NOT DETECTING ANY MOTION. THE TARGET MAY BE INJURED.

I DOUBT IT. HE'S ONE OF THEM COSTUMED FREAKS. THEY DON'T LIKE TO DIE EASY.

I'VE GOT THE SWAT TEAMS AND SECURITY TROOPS HEADED TO HIS POSITION.

PERFECT! IF HE FLINCHES...

"--SHRED HIM!"

CONTACT POINT. THIS IS COMMANDER COOPER OF THE U.S. ARMY. WE'VE SPOTTED YOUR TARGET. WHAT ARE YOUR ORDERS?

"TERMINATE ON SIGHT."

AFFIRMATIVE. 10-4.

CHOPPER TWO, DEPLOY TRACKING MISSILES. WE'LL CORNER THE TARGET TO THE EAST, THEN FALL OUT.

YOU FOLLOW BEHIND FOR THE CLEAR SHOT.

TWO SECONDS.

ONE.

TARGET LOCKED IN.

THE PARTY'S OVER.

BINGO! ELIMINATION COMPLETE.

GOOD WORK, MEN. WE'LL LET THE C.I.A. AND CIVILIANS CLEAN UP THE MESS. SEE YOU BACK AT HOME BASE.

6:8:8:7

12th PRECINCT, NEW YORK CITY... HOURS LATER...

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THIS DAY... WHEN THOSE SWORN TO THE PEOPLE'S PROTECTION HAVE BECOME THE ENEMY.

THAT *FILE* WE GAVE TO INTERNAL AFFAIRS SHOULD HAVE STOPPED CHIEF BANKS FROM EVER MAKING A MOCKERY OF HIS OFFICE AGAIN. AND IT WASN'T JUST THE *KINCAID* STUFF. THERE WAS *AMPLE* EVIDENCE TO FORCE HIS RESIGNATION.*

*SOME*ONE WIELDING A *HELL*UVA LOT OF CLOUT.

IT'S BEEN LESS THAN 20 HOURS AND BANKS HAS *ALREADY* BEEN CLEARED OF ANY AND ALL WRONG-DOING.

*LAST ISSUE.

I *KNOW*-- IT'S A BUNCH OF *CRAP!*

IT SHOULD'VE TAKEN THEM THREE WEEKS JUST TO ORGANIZE THE *QUES-TIONING*. TOOK THEM THREE WEEKS TO CLEAR US OF INVOLVEMENT WITH KINCAID'S DEAD BODY.*

AND NOW THEY'RE SAYING THAT BUGGER BANKS IS CLEAN. *CRIPES!* THIS WHOLE *SYSTEM* HAS TURNED DIRTY.

SO IT APPEARS, SIR.

MY GUESS IS THAT SOME-ONE AT C.I.A. HAS A VERY BIG HAND IN THIS.

DON'T I KNOW IT!

*ISSUE 5 -- Town.

THAT *BUILDING* THAT WAS JUST ATTACKED BELONGS TO GOVERN-MENT SECURITY... *AND* BY COINCIDENCE IS THE SAME PLACE BANKS HAS BEEN DIRECTING HIS PANIC CALLS.

SO WHAT'RE THE ODDS OUR PAL *SPAWN* HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS?

I BET MY REPUTATION.

New York Herald-Tribune

EXPLOSION ROCKS

SECURITY AGENCY

QUARTERS

ME, TOO. SPAWN WAS TRYING TO GET SOME INFO OUTTA BANKS, THEN DISAPPEARS. THEN *BANG!* THE CHIEF'S MYSTERIOUS SYMPATHETIC EAR IS ATTACKED!

THINGS DO SEEM TO BE GETTING QUITE INVOLVED.

BUT IF EVERYONE'S BEING BOUGHT OFF, WHAT'S THE GOOD OF THIS LINE OF INQUIRY?

MAYBE WE CAN...

BURKE!

I APPLAUD YOU ON YOUR EFFORTS TO BANISH ME, BUT BY NOW YOU'VE BECOME PAINFULLY AWARE HOW ***USELESS*** THAT WAS. YOU ***SEE,*** BOY, THERE'S A NATURAL PECKING ORDER IN LIFE. ***SOME*** OF US ARE MEANT FOR ***GRANDEUR*** WHILE OTHERS, LIKE ***YOURSELF,*** FLAIL TRAGICALLY THROUGH LIFE, AMOUNTING TO ***NOTHING.***

OR, TO PUT IT MORE CLEARLY, YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE WITH YOUR ***NECK*** STUCK OUT AND NOW IT'S ABOUT TO GET ***CHOPPED.***

YOU'VE BEEN A PAIN TO ME FOR OVER FOUR YEARS-- BUT ***NO MORE!***

PUL-EASSE!

CAN YOU BE A BIT ***MORE*** MELODRAMATIC.

DAMN IT, BURKE! THIS ISN'T A ***JOKE*** ANY LONGER. THOUGH I'D ***DEARLY*** LOVE TO ***FIRE*** YOUR ASS RIGHT NOW, THAT WOULD RAISE SOME EYE-BROWS. ESPECIALLY ***NOW.*** NO... I'M A ***PATIENT*** MAN. I'LL PUT UP WITH YOU TWO FOR THE TIME BEING.

BUT I SWEAR IF ***EITHER*** OF YOU EVEN ***SNEEZES*** WRONG I'LL MAKE SURE YOU LOSE EVERYTHING. YOUR JOBS. YOUR PENSIONS. YOU ***NAME*** IT.

IN THE MEANTIME I SUGGEST YOU LOOK FOR ANOTHER LINE OF WORK BECAUSE AS SOON AS THE HEAT DIES DOWN AROUND HERE YOU'RE ***DONE.***

AND ONCE YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, IF I WERE YOU, I'D CHECK OVER MY SHOULDER REGULARLY, BECAUSE I'M NOT ABOUT TO FORGET WHAT YOU TRIED TO ***DO*** TO ME!

UM, EXCUSE ME..

SCREW YOU!

YOU DON'T THREATEN ME ***OR*** MY FRIEND. UNDER***STAND?*** YOU WANT TO FIGHT US THEN BE MY GUEST-- 'CAUSE YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M NOT AFRAID OF ***YOUR*** KIND.

SEE, I'VE KEPT A ***COPY*** OF YOUR FILE AS A BACK-UP, AND IF ***ANYTHING*** HAPPENS TO ME OR SAM, I'VE ARRANGED FOR IT TO HIT ***EVERY*** MAJOR NEWS-PAPER AND TALK SHOW IN THIS COUNTRY. AND ***BELIEVE*** ME-- ***I DON'T BLUFF.***

AS FOR YOUR PATHETIC ATTEMPTS TO ***INTIMIDATE*** US, LET ME REFRESH YOUR MEMORY ON ONE LITTLE MATTER. I'M A ***SHARPSHOOTER***-- BEST IN THE ***CITY.*** YOU WANT A BULLET DEAD CENTER THROUGH EACH EYE, THEN ***PUSH*** ME.

GO GET 'IM, TWITCH.

BECAUSE I MADE A PLEDGE YEARS AGO TO RID SOCIETY OF SCUM LIKE ***YOU.***

WE NOW SHIFT TO THE SUBURBS-- QUEENS-- A SHORT TIME LATER...

WELL THANK YOU, WANDA, FOR SUCH A BEAUTIFUL DAY. THE FRESH AIR SURE FELT GOOD. THOUGH I'M SORRY I COULDN'T WALK THE PARK QUITE AS FAST AS YOU TWO.

AN AFTERNOON AWAY FROM THE HOUSE IS A PLEASURE I DON'T GET TOO OFTEN. BUT I DO ENJOY--!

JRK!

MMM!

CYAN! PLEASE! NOT SO HARD. YOU HAVE TO BE GENTLE WHEN YOU GIVE GREAT-GRANNIE A HUG.

GRACIOUS! I DO LOVE THIS CHILD OF YOURS, WANDA. ALWAYS MAKING ME FEEL SO GOOD.

WELL, SHE JUST GETS SO EXCITED ABOUT COMING OVER HERE. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, SWEETY.

I APPRECIATE YOU SPENDING A BIT MORE TIME. TOO BAD TERRY COULDN'T MAKE IT.

GRAMMA.

YEAH. HE MUST BE WORKING LATE TONIGHT. YOU KNOW, TRYING TO IMPRESS THE NEW BOSS. HOPEFULLY, HE'LL COME NEXT VISIT.

THAT'D BE NICE. I MISS HIS COMPANY, TOO. BUT I KNOW HOW BUSY YOU BOTH ARE.

I WISH IT WASN'T TRUE. BETWEEN MY CHARITY WORK AND SOME NEW CLASSES, I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME TERRY AND I JUST SAT DOWN AND TURNED ON THE TV.

...CONTINUE OUR LIVE COVERAGE OF TONIGHT'S BOMBING AT NEW YORK CITY'S MERRILL LYNCH BUILDING, AND THE REPORTED ASSAULT ON THE C.I.A HEADQUARTERS NEXT DOOR. POLICE SOURCES ARE CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT NO ONE DIED IN THIS ATTACK ON THE NATION'S LARGEST BROKERAGE INSTITUTION. THE UPPER TWO STORIES OF THIS BUILDING, WHICH HOUSE THE GYM AND CAFETERIA, HAD ALREADY BEEN SECURED FOR THE NIGHT. IT IS BELIEVED THAT NO EMPLOYEES WERE WORKING LATE IN ANY OTHER AREAS, AND MOST HAVE BEEN LOCATED AT THEIR HOMES. THE WHITE HOUSE DENIES REPORTS THAT AN AS-YET UNIDENTIFIED TERRORIST GROUP HAD STAGED THE EVENT AS A REJECTION OF THE ADMINSTRATION'S PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

OFF THE RECORD SPECULATION FROM ***MY*** ANONYMOUS SOURCES IS THAT A ***HOME-GROWN*** TERRORIST GROUP WAS BLOWING A LOUD RASPBERY AT THE PRESIDENT'S MIDDLE EAST PEACE EFFORT. AT THE SAME TIME, FRENZIED SPIN DOCTORS ARE QUICK TO DISPEL ANY ***HINT*** OF A CONNECTION TO THE OKLAHOMA CITY INCIDENT. *"JUST THE ACTIONS OF ANOTHER DERANGED INDIVIDUAL"*, THEY TELL US, WHICH IS TO SAY, NOBODY HAS A ***CLUE***. CONFUSING MATTERS EVEN FURTHER IS THE RAPID INVOLVEMENT OF OUR NATION'S MILITARY FORCES. SOME EYE-WITNESSES SAY IT WAS THE ***PRESENCE*** OF THE HELICOPTERS THAT TRIGGERED THE BOMBINGS, WHILE OTHERS MAINTAIN THE DAMAGE WAS DONE ***BEFORE*** THEIR ARRIVAL. IN EITHER CASE, EVERY AGENCY IN THE CITY IS NOW ON ALERT FOR POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTION. MEANWHILE, ALL EYES TURN TO THE WHITE HOUSE FOR SOMEONE -- ***ANY***-ONE -- TO EXPLAIN IT ALL FOR US.

ARE YOU ***KIDDING*** ME?! THIS ISN'T A CASE OF WHACKED-OUT IDIOTS LOOKING FOR ATTENTION, ***NO*** SIR! WHAT WE'RE LOOKING AT IS ***RETALIATION***. SOME GROUP IS SENDING A MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO HIDE IN THE SHADOWS, PLAYING DOPEY SPY GAMES WITH OUR TAX DOLLARS. NO ONE IS ADMITTING ANYTHING, BUT ANYONE WHO THINKS THE C.I.A. ATTACK AND THE MERRILL-LYNCH BOMBING ARE UNRELATED IS EITHER ***IGNORANT*** OR ***STUPID***. THIS WHOLE ***THING*** SMELLS ROTTEN. WORSE THAN THAT, THE PRESIDENT AND HIS AIDES ARE STONEWALLING. DIDN'T WE ELECT THESE GUYS BECAUSE THE ***PREVIOUS*** BUNCH WERE CLAIMING "DENIABILITY" TOO OFTEN?! SO NOW WE HAVE THE ***ARMY***, THE ***FINANCIAL*** COMMUNITY AND THE ***CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE*** BOYS RUNNING AROUND IN AN ANT FARM, BUT FOR A CHANGE WE'VE GOT A MAGNIFYING GLASS ON 'EM. I GUARANTEE THAT ***SOME***ONE'S HIDING SOMETHING, AND THIS TIME WE JUST MIGHT FIND OUT WHAT IT IS.

ELSEWHERE.

YOU'RE A SMART MAN. YOU UNDERSTAND HOW ALL THIS CAN COMPROMISE PEOPLE IN OUR POSITIONS.

THE PEOPLE WE REPRESENT NEED DENIABILITY REGARDING THE SENSITIVE '*ARRANGEMENTS*' WE'VE ALL MADE. THEY *DON'T* LIKE SURPRISES. *OR* ATTENTION! THE MEDIA'S CRAWLING ALL OVER THIS ONE. *WORLDWIDE*. THAT'S NOT GOOD FOR ANYONE'S BUSINESS. AND FRANKLY, THEY DON'T THINK YOU'RE WORTH THE RISK.

CAN'T BLAME 'EM. I'VE BEEN SAYING YOU'RE TRASH FOR *YEARS* NOW.

SO LET ME MAKE THIS CLEAR. YOU'RE *ALONE*. ANYONE SHINES A LIGHT IN OUR DIRECTION, THEY'LL FIND NOTHING BUT DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND OUR ASSOCIATES.

YOU'RE IN FREEFALL, WYNN, AND THIS TIME THERE ISN'T A PARACHUTE. YOU COME OUT OF THIS ONE INTACT, IT'LL BE A MIRACLE.

SO YOU GET SOME REST -- BECAUSE THIS MAY BE YOUR LAST CHANCE TO FEEL ALL CODDLED AND SECURE. AFTER ALL, WE'RE *ALL* EXPENDABLE.

I'M JUST GLAD MY CLIENTS HAVE FINALLY DISCOVERED THAT ABOUT *YOU*.

AND WHAT'S EVEN SWEETER? YOU DID IT *ALL* BY *YOURSELF*. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE, GUYS.

BOSS, WE'VE POKED AROUND ON OUR OWN AND THINGS DON'T LOOK GOOD. SEVERAL AGENTS OVERSEAS SAY THEY'RE NEAR CODE BLUE STATUS. THE FEAR OF PUBLICITY HAS EVERYONE WALKING ON EGGS.

AT THE CURRENT RATE, WE EXPECT ALMOST HALF OUR COVERT MISSIONS TO BE DISRUPTED BY WEEK'S END.

LISTEN! YOU HAVE EVERY *ONE* OF THOSE PIGS UNDERSTAND THAT I'LL HAVE THIS FIRE OUT IN A HEARTBEAT. REMIND THEM IT'S NOT WISE TO HAVE THE U.S. AGAINST THEM ON ANY OF THIS.

FINALLY ALONE, IT TAKES ALMOST TWO HOURS FOR WYNN TO FALL ASLEEP. HIS MIND'S RESISTANCE SUCCUMBS GRUDGINGLY TO HIS BODY'S DEMANDS.

MY MY. DON'T WE LOOK LIKE A LITTLE ANGEL, LYING THERE.

HEY, STUD! REMEMBER *ME*? *'COURSE* YOU DO. ANYWAYS, IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'VE GOTTEN YOURSELF INTO A BIT OF A TIGHT *SQUEEZE*.

AGAIN.

WHAT?

WELL... YOU'RE LUCKY I'VE TAKEN A *SHINE* TO YOU. SEE, OUT OF THE GOODNESS OF MY BLACK HEART I'M GOING TO DO YOU ANOTHER HUGE *FAVOR*. REMEMBER SPAWN'S ATTACK ON YOUR OFFICE? WELL, IT'LL APPEAR *EXACTLY* LIKE THE WORK OF A TERRORIST FROM ABROAD-- ANOTHER TRADE CENTER BOMBING, IF YOU WILL. NO ONE WILL BE THE WISER.

I KNOW! I KNOW! YOU WANT TO KISS ME. WELL, LET'S NOT SPOIL THE *MOMENT*.

Oh -- AND I SHOULD MENTION, IN ALL HONESTY, THAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING A DECENT JOB OF PUSHING SPAWN'S BUTTONS. DRIVING HIM INSANE, THAT'S *GREAT!*

BUT PUSH TOO HARD AND HE'LL KILL YOU IN A HEARTBEAT. WE CAN'T HAVE THAT. YOU'RE TOO IMPORTANT.

Y'KNOW, I'VE SEEN *HELL'S* DOSSIER ON YOU. PURE EVIL'S A RARE COMMODITY AMONG YOU HUMANS -- AND PAL, YOU ARE *WAY* OFF THE CHARTS. WE NEED YOU *INTACT*.

SO *PUSH* SPAWN. BUT TRY AND KEEP SOME *DISTANCE*.

EVENING, MR. WYNN. TIME FOR YOUR MEDICINE. HOPE YOU'VE BEEN GETTING SOME REST.

I'M TRYING.

TERRY AND WANDA'S HOME.

POOR CYAN, ALMOST FELL ASLEEP DURING HER BATH. I SHOULDN'T HAVE KEPT HER UP SO LATE.

I WAS HOPING TERRY WOULD PHONE TO SAY GOOD NIGHT TO HER. MAYBE THE ***BEDROOM*** PHONE RECORDER HAS SOMETHING, SINCE ***THIS*** PHONE IS OUT OF POWER, ***AGAIN***.

I WISH HE'D REMEMBER TO HANG IT UP...

Ding Dong

Uh?

NOW WHO COULD THAT BE?

COMING!

WANDA, PLEASE DON'T BE **AFRAID**. I'VE ONLY COME TO TALK.

Oh MY GOD! DON'T... DON'T *HURT* ME! *STAY AWAY!*

THE PHONE!

I'M SORRY. I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT.

HELP!

SOME-BODY--!

DAMN YOU, WANDA, I JUST WANT A **MOMENT.** JUST ONE **MINUTE** OF YOUR TIME.

BUT YOU CAN'T YELL.

DON'T YOU HEAR ME? I WANT TO TALK.

NO!

LISTEN TO ME!! THIS IS ABOUT **TERRY!** HE'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK. HE'S DECEIVED **BOTH** OF US. **LIED.**

YOU CAN'T RUN AWAY FROM THAT.

DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?! HE'S PROTECTING MY MURDERER! HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT ME. IT WAS YOU HE WANTED!

BUT HE DOESN'T LOVE YOU LIKE I DO.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

I TRADED EVERYTHING I HAD TO BE WITH YOU AGAIN.

EVERY-THING.

NOW I TERRIFY YOU. WELL, I **PROMISED** I WOULDN'T HURT YOU AGAIN. **REMEMBER** THAT? AT CONEY ISLAND.

I WAS.

INSTANTLY, SPAWN CALLS TO MIND A HUNDRED DETAILS THAT ONLY AL SIMMONS WOULD KNOW. INTIMATE MOMENTS, PRIVATE JOKES THEY SHARED...

HOW...? WHY ARE YOU ***DOING*** THIS...? HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT ***AL*** TOLD ME?

WHO ARE YOU?

DON'T YOU KNOW?

NO! NO! ***YOU AREN'T MY HUSBAND!*** HE'S ***DEAD!*** ***DAMN*** YOU-- STOP TORTURING ME. ***PLEASE...***

HE'S DEAD.

HE'S DEAD.

...ANY OF WHICH WOULD MAKE HER BELIEVE.

MOMMY?

UH?

GOD... NO! BABY, PLEASE, NOT NOW...

WHY ARE YOU CRYING?

DON'T HURT HER... PLEASE... NOT MY BABY.

DID HE MAKE YOU SAD?

DOES MY MOM-MA KNOW YOU?

I THOUGHT SHE DID. NOT ANY-MORE.

I'LL DO WHATEVER YOU WANT. JUST LEAVE HER ALONE.

AS HE LEAVES, WANDA LEANS BACK, ACCIDENTALLY TRIPPING THE ANSWERING MACHINE...

"**WANDA!!** THIS IS TERRY! GET OUT OUT OF THE HOUSE. NOW. DO YOU **HEAR** ME-- **NOW! SPAWN ATTACKED US**... HE'S GONE **NUTS**. HE MIGHT BE COMING YOUR WAY-- **HE KNOWS US**. CHRIST. HE'S **CRAZY**. YOU'VE **GOT** TO **GET AWAY.**"

HELL'S TORTURE-- **HIS** TORTURE-- CONTINUES.

HA HA

SO THIS IS IT.

THIS IS THE POISONED LEGACY MY LIFE HAS LEFT ME.

THESE DECAYED ESTATES ARE ALL THERE IS OF MY DESPISED INHERITANCE.

THIS DISMAL PALACE, CHANDELIERED WITH MAD DOG BOTTLEGLASS AND TILED WITH A MOSAIC OF SYRINGE AND HUMAN FILTH.

THESE ARE MY SUBJECTS, WRETCHED AND DISCARDED. THE DEFORMED IN BODY OR IN MIND.

THESE SIDESHOW APPARITIONS, THEN, SHALL BE MY HONOR GUARD, WITH VOMIT WORN LIKE MEDALS ON EACH RAGGED BREAST...

...FOR I HAVE ENEMIES ABOUT ME IN THIS FETID KINGDOM OF THE DAMNED THAT I HAVE CHOSEN AS MY OWN!

Wife. Kid. Nice lawn; and People Magazine. An ordinary life.

NO MATTER! LET THEM DO THEIR WORST, FOR IN THIS MILDEW-SEQUINED EMPIRE OF THE OUTCAST AND THE LOST...

THE FREAK SHALL REIGN SUPREME!

Eat dinner. Watch T.V. and maybe later go out for a beer...

HEY, GUYS, YA HEAR THAT? HE SAYS HE'S A *FREAK* AND WANTS TO JOIN THE *SUPREMES*.

LOOKS LIKE HALLOWE'EN CAME *EARLY*.

HEY! YOU! ALICE *COOPER!* TRICK OR *TREAT?*

TRICK OR TREAT? Oh, I DON'T **GIVE**. I DON'T WANT TO ENCOURAGE LITTLE BOYS LIKE YOU TO BE APPROACHING **STRANGERS** AFTER **DARK**.

YOU GET SO MANY FUNNY **PEOPLE** THESE DAYS...

...AND YOU KNOW HOW IT IS WITH PEOPLE. THEY'RE NOT ALWAYS WHAT THEY SEEM.

Oh, I DIG WHAT YOU'RE *SAYIN'*, MAN. AIN'T NO GOOD GOIN' BY *APPEARANCES*. YOU GOTTA *DIG* BENEATH THE *SURFACE*...

...AND THAT'S *EXACTLY* WHAT *WE* GONNA DO WITH *YOU!*

Something put by to get the kid through college. Things at work are going great.

Maybe next year, a new car.

HEY, *JOEY!* THERE'S *ANOTHER* ONE O' THESE ALLEY-RATS SLEEPIN' OVER *HERE!*

SO? WE'LL FILLET HIM *LATER*. RIGHT NOW, I'M GONNA TEACH OUR FREAKY *FRIEND* THAT THIS IS A *CONSERVATIVE* DISTRICT...

UNNGH...

... AND WE DON'T LIKE ANYTHING *ABNORMAL* AROUND HERE!

Oh, THE **ABNORMALS** I CAN HANDLE.

IT'S THE **SUB-HUMANS** THAT REALLY PISS **ME** OFF.

WHAT IN HELL...?

HELL? WHAT DO **YOU** KNOW ABOUT IT? YOU AND YOUR FELLOW RODENTS **PREY** UPON THE HOMELESS AND THE WEAK AND THEN GO HOME TO **MOM!**

BELIEVE **ME**, YOU KNOW **NOTHING** ABOUT HELL...

AW, **GOD!** AW, JEEZ, *NO!*

...BUT I CAN **TEACH** YOU.

AAAAA!!

THEY WON'T STOP RUNNING UNTIL THEY HIT OCEAN-- WITH LUCK, NOT EVEN THEN. I HOPE I DIDN'T FRIGHTEN YOU TOO MUCH.

MY FRIEND, I'VE MET WITH THINGS MORE TERRIBLE THAN YOU UPON MY TRAVELS THROUGH THIS WORLD OF ROT AND STARLIGHT.

IN FACT, IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE FELLOW KNIGHTS; BROTHERS WITHIN THIS PUTRID, DECADENT DOMAIN OF FLY-BLOWN SHADOWS.

I, SIR, AM A FREAK OF NATURE, AND PROUD TO BE CALLED ONE. PUT IT THERE.

Uhh... MOST PEOPLE CALL ME THE SPAWN. IT'LL DO, I GUESS.

SO, uh, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE. DRESSED UP LIKE THAT?

I COULD ASK THE SAME OF YOU.

WHO KNOWS? PERHAPS OUR ANSWERS WOULD BE FAR MORE SIMILAR THAN YOU'D IMAGINE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I MEAN PERHAPS WE ARE BOTH MEN TRANSFORMED, ERODED BY FATE'S CARRION-BLOATED TIDE: MADE INTO SOMETHING OTHER THAN WE WERE.

MADE INTO FREAKS.

THE LIVES WE HAD PLUCKED FROM US BY THE CLAWS OF BEASTS; CONDEMNED TO HAUNT THIS ROACH-JEWELED TWILIGHT WORLD.

DOES THAT RING ANY BELLS?

PERHAPS. SO WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

MY STORY? WHAT, YOU MEAN MY ORIGIN? I COME FROM SOMEWHERE DARK, THE MANSION OF MY PAST FRESCOED IN BLOOD...

Cartoon wallpaper in the boy's room. Ding Dongs. Oprah.

...WITH FIEND-CARVED GOTHIC DOORS I HARDLY DARE OPEN.

"SEE, ONCE I HAD A RICH, EXCITING LIFE. I WORKED IN UNDERCOVER OPERATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT, AND HAD A LOVELY WIFE AND KID BESIDES.

"ALL THAT GOT BLOWN APART ONE SUMMER'S NIGHT. THE HIT WAS SLICK AND ORGANIZED. PROFESSIONAL.

"IT DIDN'T TAKE TOO LONG TO FIND OUT WHO'D BEEN BEHIND IT: SOMEONE I'D TANGLED WITH BEFORE IN MY OPERATIONAL CAPACITY.

"THEY CALLED HIM DOCTOR DELIRIUM, AN INSANE SCIENTIST WITH THE MEANS TO CONTROL MINDS... OR ELSE DESTROY THEM!

"SEEKING VENGEANCE I WENT AFTER HIM, BUT IN MY RAGE I WAS TOO EAGER AND TOO CLUMSY.

"AMBUSHED, I MYSELF WAS SOON A PRISONER OF DELIRIUM.

THE TREATMENT HE SUBJECTED ME TO WAS DESIGNED TO TURN ME INTO A HUMAN VEGETABLE.

"DRUGS THAT MAKE MEN INTO STUMBLING CATTLE. TERRIFYING SHOCKS THAT WIPE YOUR BRAIN CLEAN IN AN AVALANCHE OF BELLS.

"HE'D CHANGED MY MIND AROUND, BUT NOT IN THE WAY HE HOPED. I WASN'T ONE OF HIS OBEDIENT, CONFORMIST DRONES.

"ALL MY PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS HAD IN SOME WAY BEEN ENHANCED BY HIS EXPERIMENTS ON ME. I BUSTED OUT...

"...OUT INTO A NEW LIFE, REBORN AMONGST THE SPLENDID RUINS OF THIS CITY'S UNDERSIDE, FAR FROM CONFORMITY.

"REBORN A FREAK, WITH NO DESIRE EXCEPT TO SLAKE THE MADNESS RAGING IN MY SOUL UPON THE BURNING COGNAC OF REVENGE!

ALAS, THE ODDS ARE STACKED AGAINST ME. THE WARPED DEMON WHO TRANSFORMED ME TO THIS SINISTER GROTESQUE HAS VAST RESOURCES.

...WHILE ONE WHOSE STORY IS AS MONSTROUS AND UNNATURAL AS MINE CAN EXPECT LITTLE AID OR SYMPATHY FROM NORMAL FOLK.

I'M NOT SURE THERE'S SUCH A THING AS "NORMAL FOLK," NOT 'ROUND HERE, ANYWAY...

...BUT IT'S NOT ONLY YOU WHOSE LIFE GOT WARPED BY DEMONS. I'LL DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP.

THANK YOU. I CAN'T SAY WHAT IT MEANS TO FIND A BROTHER IN THIS GORGEOUS PURGATORY OF CIGAR BUTTS AND DEAD DOGS!

IF YOU WOULD HELP ME, WE MUST STORM THE FORTRESS OF DELIRIUM THROUGH SUBTERRANEAN ROUTES I HAVE DISCOVERED. WE MUST BOTH DESCEND...

...INTO THAT STYGIAN DARK WHEREIN WE CREATURES OF THE SHADOW FIND OUR ONLY DWELLING PLACE.

OUR ONLY SOLACE.

Drink milk out of the carton. Call mom. Send out for some ice cream. Watch a game.

CH

THERE, SO...

...WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IT'S UNBELIEVABLE. YOU'VE BUILT YOURSELF A MANSION IN THE SEWERS?

AND WHERE BETTER FOR THE LIKES OF US THAN IN THESE HALLWAYS, ERMINE-RUGGED WITH RATS; GERM-STREWN WITH COLORED MAGGOTS?

MORE THAN THAT, IT IS THE PATHWAY TO MY ENEMY. THIS WAY...

WE CAN'T APPROACH DELIRIUM'S FORTRESS FROM ABOVE THE GROUND.

HE'D BE EXPECTING THAT, UNLIKE THIS ROUTE THAT ONLY PALE, BLIND ALLIGATORS KNOW.

DOES HIS PLACE HAVE DEFENSES?

YOU CAN'T IMAGINE.

MICROWAVE BEAMS THAT WILL POACH YOUR BRAIN INSIDE YOUR SKULL, AND MIND-CONTROL TECHNIQUES THAT HAVE YOU DOUBTING WHO YOU ARE!

I STILL REMEMBER THAT EXQUISITE TORTURE...

"HE DISMANTLED ALL MY DREAMS AND THEN DID NEUROSURGERY UPON MY SOUL.

"IT WASN'T JUST MY PARENTS THAT HE KILLED. HE BUTCHERED MY WHOLE LIFE."

YOUR PARENTS? I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOUR WIFE AND KID GOT...

I SAID MY FAMILY WERE KILLED. THAT BASTARD TOOK OUT MOM AND DAD AS WELL.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE, TO HAVE YOUR LOVED ONES TAKEN FROM YOU?

YES. YES, I GUESS I DO.

LEAD ON. I'M UP FOR ANY RING OF THE INFERNO THAT YOU CARE TO SHOW ME.

Coffee percolating in the kitchen. Later on, a little Springsteen; little Meatloaf. Fridays, we go bowling.

WE'RE IN.

NEAR THE END OF THE WORLD

MY GOD. WHAT IS THIS STUFF?

THESE ARE THE MEREST FRACTION OF THE PSYCHE-SHREDDING MECHANISMS AT DELIRIUM'S DISPOSAL.

THIS IS THE COLD, OIL-PERFUMED ZOO IN WHICH HE KEEPS THE METAL BEASTS THAT TEAR MEN'S HEADS APART.

WE MUST GO FURTHER, DEEP INTO THE WINDING ARTERIES THAT FEED THIS HEART OF DARK-NESS...

HEY! HEY, YOU!

LOOKS LIKE A COUPLE OF THE DOCTOR'S *SPECIAL PROJECTS* DECIDED TO GO *WALKABOUT.*

DON'T TAKE ANY *CHANCES.* LET'S JUST GET THEM WRAPPED UP *FAST!*

GHAAAAH!!

WATCH OUT FOR THEIR NEEDLES OF NOTHING-NESS!

I'M SORRY, PAL. WE'LL TAKE OUR BRAINS UN-SCRAMBLED.

LET'S SHOW THEM HOW REAL WARRIORS OF THE ABYSS CAN REVEL IN THE MAW OF SLAUGHTER!

Favorite armchair. Favorite shows. The drone of mowers in the street outside.

THERE! THAT'S THE LAST OF 'EM.

GOOD. WE HAVE NO TIME TO WASTE. WE HAVE TO BREACH THE INNER SANCTUM OF DELIRIUM BEFORE ONE OF HIS HUMAN VIPERS RAISES AN ALARM!

HERE.

BEYOND THESE DOORS THE DUKE OF ALL DELUSION AND DAMNATION WAITS. IF THERE ARE DOUBTS WITHIN YOUR SOUL, THEN TURN BACK HERE.

WHERE DO WE FIND HIM?

WHERE THE DARK IS AT ITS THICKEST. WHERE THE SCREAMS APPROACH THEIR LOUDEST. WHERE THE RUBBLE OF MAN'S SANITY LIES SMASHED AND SUNDERED ALL ABOUT...

Uh-uh. NOT ME, FRIEND.

IF YOU'RE TALKIN' 'BOUT DAMNATION THEN I FIGURE YOU'VE GOT ME ALONG FOR THE RIDE.

SHREDDING!

THERE HE IS! THE DESTROYER OF HUMAN SOULS. THE ONE WHO TOOK MY FAMILY AWAY THEN TRIED TO ERASE MY MEMORIES OF THEM.

SAY YOUR PRAYERS, DEMON. TONIGHT I SHALL END YOUR REIGN OF TERROR.

W-WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Doctor's appointment at 3:00. Put roast on at 4:00.

DO YOU NEED HELP?

THANKS, FRIEND, BUT NO. YOU GUARD THE DOOR. I'VE WAITED TOO LONG FOR THIS MOMENT. MY MAKER AND I ARE ABOUT TO HAVE A MEETING OF THE MINDS...

...WITH WHAT I HAVE LEFT.

WHAT'S THIS?! DO I SENSE FEAR! CAN IT POSSIBLY BE THAT THE ALMIGHTY DEL'RIUM IS AFRAID?

THE TIME IS LONG SINCE PASSED FOR SOMEONE LIKE YOU TO HAVE FEELINGS!

BZZT

Y-YOU'RE INSANE.

PRECISELY!

YES! SING ME YOUR TEARS OF JOY!

AND I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH FOR THAT.

BUT LET ME TRY.

YAH-HA!

SSZH

SPT!

A GUN? I'D HAVE THOUGHT A KINGPIN LIKE YOU WOULD BE TOO SUPERIOR FOR SUCH TRIVIALITIES!

Dinner at 6:00. Strata council meeting at 7:30.

NO!

YOUR LORD'S TAKING A BATH. HE FELT DIRTY ABOUT CREATING YOU.

HE HAS NO STOMACH FOR WOMAN-AND-CH'LD KILLERS. AND YOU KNOW SOMETHING... NEITHER DO I.

HA HA HAA

POW!

URGT!

FREAK! HURRY UP! THINGS ARE STARTING TO HEAT UP!

BE WITH YOU IN A MINUTE, DEAR.

GAME TIME, DELIRIUM. "I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE SOMETHING THAT GOES BANG!"

WEEOWEEOWEEO

Ahhh.
NOW ISN'T THIS JUST PEACHY--YOUR CORRUPT BOYS IN BLUE.
PLEASE! I'LL DO WHATEVER YOU WANT.
POLICE
POLICE
TOO LATE.
I NEED MY FAMILY. TOO BAD YOU KILLED THEM.
SO-- DOESN'T LEAVE YOU WITH MUCH TO OFFER. DOES IT?
BUT THANKS FOR ASKING.
SMYRCH!
NOW GO CRAWL BACK STANKY BLACK HOLE FROM WHICH YOU CAME.
OH! I FORGOT...

...SEND ME A POSTCARD WHEN YOU GET THERE.

KRASH

725

PROTECT A

SPAWNIE, IT'S TIME WE MADE A HASTY RETREAT.

WHERE'S THE DOCTOR?

TAKING A POWER NAP. NOTHING TO BE CONCERNED WITH.

BUT WHAT **IS** ARE HIS HORDES OF MIND-CONTROLLED **HENCHMEN**. DELIRIUM HAD THEM **ALL** UNDER HIS THUMB: **COPPERS. MAFIA LORDS. POLITICAL PERSONALITIES.**

THIS SANCTUM OF HIS WILL BE CRAWLING WITH HUNDREDS OF ZOMBIES OUT FOR OUR BLOOD IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES.

WE NEED TO CREATE A CLEAN PATH OF ESCAPE.

THEN, MY REVENGE SHALL BE COMPLETE.

11:00. A warm-up of Ovaltine, and some ESPN Sportscenter.

AT THE FEDERAL HEALTH SERVICES DEPARTMENT...

I'M SORRY TO CALL YOU DOWN HERE SO ABRUPTLY, MRS. KULBICZI.

YOUR HUSBAND HAS ESCAPED FROM THE INSTITUTION *AGAIN*, AND EFFORTS TO FIND HIM HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.

THIS IS *MR.* KULBICZI, RIGHT?

NO, IT'S *NOT*. I THOUGHT HE'D BE OUT OF MY LIFE FOR *GOOD* WHEN I LEFT HIM 8 YEARS AGO. HE JUST *LOST IT* WHEN I TOLD HIM I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE KIDS.

I COULDN'T *TAKE* IT ANYMORE. HIS ALWAYS RUNNING OFF. I'M TELLING YOU, HIS GRIP ON *REALITY* IS SCREWED UP. BUT I GUESS YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT. WELL, HE'S NOT *MY* PROBLEM ANYMORE.

WE WERE HOPING YOU'D HELP US TRY AND...

I DON'T *THINK SO*. HE CAN ROT IN THE STREET FOR ALL I CARE. I'M *SICK* OF BEING DRAGGED INTO HIS FREAKY DREAM WORLD.

WHY DON'T YOU CALL HIS *DOCTOR*, OR SOMETHING?

YEAH.

WE'D LIKE YOUR HELP IN FINDING HIM. YOU'VE BEEN VERY HELPFUL IN THE PAST, AND WE DO APPRECIATE IT. I'M SURE THIS ISN'T EASY.

WE *HAVE*. BUT NO ONE SEEMS TO BE ANSWERING AT DR. DeLOREAN'S OFFICE. WE'LL TRY AGAIN IN THE MORNING.

OKAY, FREAK, IT'S YOU AND ME NOW. I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT THE HELL WE JUST DID?!

YOU WANT ANSWERS. FINE. HERE'S THE SCOOP. THE WHOLE INSANE GIG, IT'S JUST A SHTICK, ALONG WITH THIS WIG AND MAKE-UP. IT JUST SERVES SOME PURPOSE, LIKE YOUR GET-UP.

SOUNDS KINDA CRAZY, BUT IT'S ALL I'VE GOT. THAT MURDERER DELIRIUM, HE WIPED OUT MY FAMILY. DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT MEANS?

SO YEAH, I KILLED THE FAT SLOB. WHAT'RE YOU GOING TO DO, TAKE ME TO JAIL?

GO AHEAD. I DON'T CARE ANYMORE.

I'M NOT YOUR CONSCIENCE. YOU DID WHAT YOU HAD TO.

I'M FIGHTING A FEW INNER DEMONS MYSELF. YOU'VE REMINDED ME TO STAY FOCUSED.

Tuck the kids into bed. Snuggle up to the wife. All in a pretty good day.

FOCUSED?

I'VE GOT MY NEXT TARGET ALREADY PICKED OUT.

WELL, GOOD LUCK. HOPE YOU SUCCEED.

I WILL.

HEE HeHe HeHee!

...es at the window, the old man sits
...companion at his feet. Feeling secure that
...p enough, he peers into his brandy, watching
...ear as he moves the glass in a circular motion
...n, he replays today's actions to ensure that nothing
...verlooked, and that every step he took was untraceable.
The skin from the hands and feet was removed carefully, sliding off as easily as gloves. The body's other distinguishing marks were carefully obscured or removed.
...tooth was extracted (using the set of pliers recovered
...Christmas from his brother) and now lay smashed beyond
...recognition, blended in with the small, colored rocks at the
...bottom of the fish tank.
...In the ...ace, a pine knob flares suddenly,
...bringing him back to the moment. He has been sitting there, watching the fire ... piece of evidence, since ...
...and he's ...

As snow thrashes at the window, the old man sits quietly, his faithful companion at his feet. Feeling secure that the hole was deep enough, he peers into his brandy, watching a funnel appear as he moves the glass in a circular motion. Once again, he replays today's actions to ensure that nothing was overlooked, and that every step he took was untraceable.
The skin from the hands and feet was removed carefully, sliding off as easily as gloves. The body's ...ishing marks were carefully obscured
...tooth was extracted (using the
...d last Christmas from his brother)
...d beyond recognition, blended
...bored rocks at the bottom of the
...In the ...ace, a pine knob flares sud...
...bringing him back to the moment. ...
...ting there, watching the fire ... piece of evidence, since ...
...and he's ...
AS LIGHT BREAKS OVER THE HORIZON, THE GUARD LOOKS UP, FEELING A BIT ANNOYED. FOR WEEKS, NOT A SOUL HAS VENTURED THROUGH THE GATES, AND THE MASTER EXPECTS NO ONE.

ANOTHER TOURIST TAKING A WRONG TURN--! I WISH THEY'D FIX THAT SIGN UP THE ROAD.

THE HEADLIGHTS' BRIGHTNESS MASKS THE DRIVER'S IDENTITY.
EXCUSE ME. YOU'VE TAKEN A WRONG TURN. THE INN IS ABOUT HALF A MILE BACK, ON YOUR LEFT.

I'VE COME TO SEE THE PROFESSOR. HE'S EXPECTING ME.

I'M SORRY, BUT MY LOG BOOK DOESN'T SHOW ANY VISITORS TONIGHT. LET ME VALIDATE YOUR I.D. BEFORE I CALL UP TO THE HOUSE. I HAVE STRICT ORDERS NOT TO DISTURB THE DOCTOR.

WAIT A MINUTE. THIS CARD'S EXPIRED. YOU'LL HAVE TO COME BACK TOMORROW WITH VALID DOCUMEN-TATION.

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY.

THE GUARD'S MUFFLED SCREAMS STOP AS THE CRACK OF HIS BREAKING NECK ECHOES THROUGH THE LEAFLESS TREES.

ONCE AGAIN, SILENCE BLANKETS THE MOONLIT EVENING, AS FADING WARMTH FROM THE DEAD GUARD'S HAND THAWS A PATCH OF ICY GROUND.

THAT WAS EASY. TOO EASY.

DEBRIS LIFTS AND SETTLES AS THE DOORS SLOWLY OPEN.

CHRIS FINDS HIMSELF UNUSUALLY APPREHENSIVE. SENSES STRAIN FOR EVERY SOUND IN THE DEAD AIR. WARILY, HE ASSESSES THE CONTENTS OF EACH DARK CORNER.

WHAT THE HELL'S GOING *ON* HERE...? I HEARD THE DOC WAS A *LITTLE* CRAZY, BUT WHAT WEIRDO COULD LIVE WITH THIS FILTH?

HIS FOOTSTEPS ARE MUFFLED BY THE DUST THAT COATS THE ROOM. CAUTIOUSLY, HE NAVIGATES PAST THE DECREPIT MACHINES.

THEN--A SIGN OF LIFE. WARILY, CHRIS EASES HIS WEAPON FROM ITS HOLSTER.

I KNEW I'D FIND THAT BASTARD HERE.

IN FACT, IT'S ONLY EMPTY NOISE FROM THE TELE-VISION. CHRIS BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF. THE ROOM IS EMPTY.

JESUS, WHAT A MESS-- AND THIS GUY'S A WELL-RESPECTED DOCTOR?

THERE *HAS* TO BE SOME-THING HERE... SOMETHING I CAN TAKE WITH ME.

CHRIS SEARCHES THROUGH THE ROWS AND ROWS OF OLD VIDEOS. HIS ORDERS WERE VERY CLEAR ABOUT WHAT HE IS EXPECTED TO FIND. EACH TAPE, AS PREDICTED, IS SIMILARLY LABELED.

ANNA -1975.
ANNA -1981.
ANNA -1986.

IT'S THE TAPE ALREADY IN THE VCR, THEN, OR NOTHING. AS HE PRESSES "PLAY," THE ROOM GOES MOMENTARILY BLACK.

VLSS VIDEO INDEX SEARCH SYSTEM

REW

RECORD

FF

EJC

NIGHT ENVELOPS THE CITY. A CALM SILENCE CARESSES ITS EMPTY STREETS-- BROKEN BY THE MANIC RUMMAGINGS OF RATS AND DOGS.

AND GHOSTS.

THE RESTLESS CREATURE FORAGES THROUGH MOUNDS OF DEBRIS.

SEARCHING FOR WHAT WILL BRING SECURITY.

VENGEANCE.

PEACE.

GOOD. JUST WHERE I LEFT THEM. SOME QUICK MAINTAINANCE AND THEY'LL BE READY FOR WYNN.

THAT SLIMY PIG! LYING IN SOME HOSPITAL SURROUNDED BY TWENTY GUARDS. YOU SLEEP WELL, JASON. I NEED YOU NICE AND HEALTHY. SO I CAN BLOW OFF YOUR HEAD.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE. REMEMBER? YOU TAUGHT ME THAT. NEVER SURRENDER. NEVER BACK DOWN. KILL OR BE KILLED.

HELL'S BEEN WAITING FOR THIS.

FAMILIARITY AMPLIFIES SPAWN'S INTENSITY, AS HE PREPARES. EASILY WIPING AWAY THE GRIMY RESIDUE OF MONTHS OF STORAGE IN ROTTING RUBBISH.

AK-830 ROCKET LAUNCHER.

I REMEMBER THIS BABY.

BLOWS HOLES THROUGH ELEPHANTS. ANYTHING. USED IT ON THAT LIBYAN MISSION. WORKED LIKE A CHARM THEN.

LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING'S IN ORDER. NOW ALL I NEED IS...

...THE FINAL TOUCH.

PREPARING FOR WAR? YOU'VE NO IDEA WHO YOUR REAL ENEMY IS.

YOU'RE CHASING A RED HERRING.

BEFORE SATISFYING HIS CURIOSITY ABOUT WHAT'S ON THE TAPE, CHRIS SCOURS EVERY REMAINING INCH OF THE MANSION. HE FINDS NO ONE.

WITH MY HEALTH'S DETERIORATION, I HAVE CEASED ASSEMBLING MY NOTES, AND THE NEUROLOGY RESEARCH HAS BEEN FORCIBLY TERMINATED. WITHOUT THIS RECORDING, I FEAR MY RESEARCH WILL REMAIN UNKNOWN.

I MUST START AT THE BEGINNING. AT THE ROOT OF MY EXPERIMENTATION.

I'M GOING TO GET A FRIGGIN' DISSERTATION.

MY NAME IS **FREDERICK WILLHEIM**, AND I WAS BORN IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND.

AS A POVERTY-STRICKEN BOY, I DREAMED OF BECOMING A **DOCTOR**. WHEN WAR ENGULFED EUROPE, I SERVED AS A FRONT-LINE MEDIC IN EXCHANGE FOR TRAINING AS A PHYSICIAN.

IN MY FOURTH YEAR OF SERVICE, I MET THE WOMAN WHO WOULD FOR-EVER CHANGE MY LIFE.

ANNA. INTELLIGENT. CARING. BEAUTIFUL. I COULD *ENDURE* THE RELENTLESS BARRAGE OF RUINED YOUNG BODIES ONLY BECAUSE SHE STOOD *BESIDE* ME.

AFTER A YEAR TOGETHER, SHE DID ME THE HONOR OF BECOMING MY *WIFE*. SHE MEANS *EVERY-THING* TO ME.

AS WAR ENDED, SHE SUFFERED TWO MISCARRAIGES, BROUGHT ON BY AN UNKNOWN *NEUROLOGICAL* DISEASE. HER HEALTH THEN *DECLINED* RAPIDLY. I, A *DOCTOR*, STOOD BY, *HELPLESS*.

MY LIFE WOULD BE *MEANING-LESS* WITH-OUT HER. I THEN FOCUSED *SOLELY* ON STUDYING NEUROLOGY, AND VOWED TO SAVE HER LIFE OR DIE *TRYING*.

TRANSFUSIONS BECAME *MANDA-TORY*. I DEMAN-DED AN INCREASE IN THE FREQUENCY OF DONORS. *NOTHING* WOULD STOP ME FROM SAVING HER.

LEARNING OF MY RESEARCH, THE U.S. ARMY INVITED ME TO HEAD UP THEIR *CYBERNETIC SIMIAN* PROJECT.

I WAS FORCED TO ACCEPT THE OFFER, AS THEIR ECONOMIC SUPPORT WAS URGENTLY NEEDED IF I WAS TO SAVE HER LIFE. THEY COERCED US TO MOVE TO THE UNITED STATES.

THE DEMANDS FOR IMMEDIATE RESULTS ON *THEIR* PROJECT JEOPARDIZED *HER* RECOVERY. MY SWEET, BEAUTIFUL ANNA SLIPPED INTO A *COMA*.

MY ANNA WAS DYING.

ONE MORNING, HER HEART STOPPED. NOTHING COULD BRING BACK ITS BEAT.

SADNESS FILLED MY SOUL. SHE DESERVED A PLACE, AS BEAUTIFUL AS HER, FOR HER FINAL REST.

A *SAFE* PLACE, WHERE I VISITED HER *ALL THE TIME*.

I MADE A *PROMISE* I WOULD BRING HER BACK.

DEVOTED TO MY ANNA, I DEMANDED EXTRA ASSISTANCE TO SPEED UP THE EXPERIMENTS.

I HAD TO ENSURE MY THEORIES WERE *VALID* BEFORE I COULD HELP MY LOVE.

BELIEVING THAT CONVENTIONAL ***WEAPONS*** OF WAR WERE INSUFFICIENT, GOVERNMENTS RACED TO CREATE A SUPER-HUMAN ***SOLDIER***.

AFTER YEARS OF ATTEMPTS TO INFUSE HUMANS WITH MULTIPLE BIONIC PARTS, RESEARCHERS CONCLUDED THAT THE HUMAN MIND COULD NOT WITHSTAND THE ***PAIN*** OF THE IMPLANTS. ANOTHER VESSEL WAS NEEDED. THE SIMIAN WAS CHOSEN DUE TO ITS NEUROLOGICAL SIMILARITIES TO MAN.

I WAS TO UNITE THE CYBERNETICS WITH THE GORILLA, WHICH WAS CODE-NAMED ***CY-GOR***.

DUE TO THE APE'S HIGH PAIN THRESHOLD, I PROVED FLESH AND BIONICS ***COULD*** BE FUSED.

BUT THE GOVERNMENT DEMANDED A SUPER ***HUMAN***.

I HAD TO FIND A WAY TO TRANSFER MAN'S THOUGHT PROCESSES INTO THE APE. A BRAIN TRANSPLANT WAS NOT VIABLE, DUE TO THE HUMAN ***PAIN*** PERCEPTION PROBLEM. SO, ATTRIBUTES OF A HUMAN MIND WERE INTRODUCED INTO THE APE IN SLOW, CALCULATED PER-CENTAGES, WORKING UP TO AN IDEAL 80/20 HUMAN-TO-APE RATIO. THIS INTERESTED ME ***TREMENDOUSLY***--

-- FOR I KNEW IF I COULD PLACE A MIND INTO A NEW BODY, I COULD KEEP MY PROMISE TO MY ANNA. MY LOVELY ANNA. SHE WOULD LIVE AGAIN. I ***PROMISED*** HER.

FOR ANNA'S SAKE, PRECISION IN MY EXPERIMENTATION WAS ***MANDATORY.*** HOWEVER, THE GOVERNMENT, WHILE DEMANDING IMPOSSIBLE DEADLINES, MADE SUBSTANTIAL CUTS TO MY ***RESOURCES.***

STILL, I CONTINUED MY RESEARCH WITH THE SAME ***CARE*** AND ***ATTENTION*** AS ALWAYS...

...USING ONLY THE MOST ***ADVANCED*** EQUIPMENT AND SOPHISTICATED ***SUBJECTS.***

MAKING DETAILED NOTES IN ORGANIZED ***JOURNALS.***

WHEN THE ***CY-GOR*** MOVED OF ITS OWN FREE WILL AND LIVED WITHOUT ARTIFICIAL LIFE SUPPORT, I KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR MY ANNA. I ***PROMISED*** HER. ALL MY HARD WORK WAS GOING TO PAY OFF. SHE WOULD, ONCE AGAIN, BE WITH ME.

DAYS BLURRED INTO EACH OTHER BECAUSE I KNEW THAT SOON ANNA AND I WOULD BE TOGETHER AGAIN. I COULD FEEL MY HEALTH DECLINING, BUT NOTHING COULD STOP ME. NOT ***NOW.***

THAT BRINGS ME UP TO DATE. I MUST CONTINUE MY WORK. ANNA DEPENDS ON ME.

THE TELEVISION SCREEN FILLS ONCE AGAIN WITH SNOW, BRINGING CHRIS BACK TO REALITY. BELIEVING THE TAPE IS OVER, HE RISES TO REMOVE IT FROM THE VCR, BUT STOPS WHEN THE PICTURE RESUMES.

HELP ME. I'VE BEEN LYING HERE FOR THREE DAYS. I'M WEAK. I STRUGGLED FOR DAYS TO REACH THE MICROPHONE.

I CANNOT MOVE MY LEFT ARM, OR MY LEGS. I'VE HAD A ***STROKE***. I CANNOT REACH HER. MY ***ANNA***.

I'M NOT READY. NOT ***YET***. THE BEAST. AT LEAST FOUR ***DAYS*** HAVE PASSED. I CAN'T MOVE. IT WILL GET...

A THUNDERING CRASH ECHOES THROUGHOUT THE MANSION. A POWER FAILURE SHROUDS THE ROOM IN DARKNESS. CHRIS REMAINS SEATED, HEARING ONLY HIS OWN HEART BEATING. FINALLY, THE AUXILIARY LIGHTS FLICKER ON.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, OLD MAN?

YOU. JUST WHO ARE YOU HUNTING?

WYNN.

WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

AN ACQUAINTANCE SHOWED ME HOW TO DEAL WITH MY MAKER.*

*SEE LAST ISSUE··Tom.

DANGEROUS ADVICE, IF YOU ASK ME. DO YOU BELIEVE *EVERY* FREAK YOU MEET?

YOU'VE BEEN HOUNDING ME FOR MONTHS. WHAT ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

IT DOESN'T MATTER. IT'S WHAT *YOU'RE* BECOMING THAT'S MY CONCERN.

YOUR MURDER DID NOT *BEGIN* OR *END* WITH WYNN. KILLING HIM WON'T SOLVE ANYTHING.

IN FACT, HIS DEATH WOULD CREATE EVEN *MORE* PROBLEMS.

YOU'RE WRONG. UNTIL I KILL THAT MURDERING SONUVABITCH I'M NEVER GOING TO REST.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME. HE'S TOO VALUABLE TO YOU. WITHOUT HIM, YOU WILL NEVER KNOW *WHY* YOU WERE KILLED.

DO YOU REALLY THINK WYNN HOLDS THE *POWER* TO HAVE YOU KILLED AT A WHIM?

YOU JUST DON'T GET IT. WYNN MADE CHAPEL PULL THE TRIGGER. NO ONE ELSE. CHAPEL TOOK THE ORDER. WYNN GAVE IT.

YOU WON'T BELIEVE IT. THIS GUY'S GOT A THRONE AN' *EVERY*THING. LIFTS BUILDINGS, TOO. LIKE THAT GUY IN THE COMIC BOOKS. HE FLIES, BENDS STEEL AN' *EVERY*THING.

COOL.

THE THRONE IS MADE UP OF ALL THIS *STUFF*. IT'S *HUGE*, MAN.

COOL.

WYNN'S MY TARGET NOW. HE'S FIRST ON MY LIST. TERRY, THAT TRAITOR, TOOK MY WIFE AND NOW HE'S PROTECTING WYNN'S BACK. HE'S SECOND.

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED *WHY* THEY PUT YOU IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ELITE FORCE?

I SAVED THE **PRESIDENT**, COG. THERE AREN'T MANY LIKE ME AROUND.

DIDN'T THAT SEEM A BIT TOO *CONVENIENT*?

LOOK. YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, GET TO IT. 'CAUSE WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED, WYNN'S STILL...

...GOING TO **DIE!**

AHH!

AHH!

PLEASE. PLEASE. PLEASE. PLEASE. DON'T SHOOT.

Uh?

RUN.

Oh GOD. Oh GOD. Oh GOD.

HEY GUYS! I...

AW, SCREW IT.

NOW, WHAT WERE YOU DRIVING AT?

THAT I WAS RECRUITED BY THE PRESIDENT FOR SOME SECRET AGENDA?

NO, ***NOT*** THE PRESIDENT. THOSE WHO ***SERVE*** HIM.

CONSIDER HOW MUCH EFFORT AND INFLUENCE A TRUSTED GROUP WOULD HAVE TO EXERT IF THEY DECIDED TO ***RID*** THEMSELVES OF THEIR ***LEADER.*** ALL THE WHILE THEY'D BE PUTTING AT RISK EVERY-THING THEY'D ACHIEVED. ***YEARS*** OF PLANNING MIGHT BE REQUIRED. THE CLANDESTINE RENDESVOUS. THE CONVE-NIENT ***ALIBIES.***

BUT WHAT IF SOME-THING... OR SOME***ONE***... INTERFERED AT THE CRUCIAL MOMENT. THE VAST RESOURCES INVESTED IN THE MISSION WERE THEN ***WASTED.*** WORSE, THE HIDDEN CONSPIRITORS COULDN'T ***ELIMINATE*** THE INTERLOPER, FOR NOW, HE...BY WHICH I MEAN ***YOU,*** AL... HAD BECOME A NATIONAL ***HERO.***

AT THE SAME TIME, YOU'D BECOME ***UNTOUCH-ABLE.*** IF ANYTHING WERE TO ***HAPPEN*** TO YOU, THE ENTIRE ***NATION*** WOULD WANT TO KNOW WHY. THEIR BEST OPTION, THEN, WAS TO BRING YOU ***INSIDE*** THEIR RANKS... TO KEEP YOU UNDER 'HOUSE SURVEILLANCE'.

YOU SEE, WHILE THEY COULDN'T HAVE ANTICI-PATED THE INTERVENTION OF A BRIGHT YOUNG OFFICER THAT ***FIRST*** TIME, THEY COULD MAKE SURE YOU'D BE NOWHERE NEAR THE KILL ZONE FOR THEIR ***NEXT*** TRY.

TRUST ME. ***JASON WYNN*** IS JUST A SMALL PIECE OF A ***BIGGER*** PUZZLE.

...AND ***YOU'RE*** A ***PUPPET,*** AL. AT LEAST YOU ***WERE.*** IT'S TIME YOU STARTED THINK-ING LIKE A ***FREE MAN.***

OBVIOUSLY, HE ***DICTATES*** HIS NOTES ON EVERYTHING, SO THERE SHOULD BE A TAPE DISCUSSING THE EXTRACTION FORMULA.

OR AT LEAST SOME FILES, A DIARY, NOTES, ***SOME***-THING.

I CAN'T GO BACK EMPTY-HANDED.

AS CHRIS SWINGS OPEN THE DOOR, THE POWER RESUMES.

Oh MY... WHAT THE...

*ANNA'S HALF-DECOMPOSED BODY SITS IDLY WHILE PRECIOUS FLUIDS FLOW TO HER **BRAIN**. THE DOCTOR FORBADE ANYONE, INCLUDING THE ENTRANCE GUARD, FROM ENTERING HIS HOUSE. HER DEATH WAS HIS **SECRET**.*

*DUE TO HER BODY'S DETERIORATION, THE DOCTOR PLANNED TO TRANSFER HER BRAIN INTO A BIGGER, STRONGER HUMAN BODY. HE **PROMISED** THEY WOULD BE **TOGETHER** AGAIN.*

JEEZ-US. THIS GUY'S A PSYCHO.

I FEAR THIS TAPE WILL END BEFORE ANYONE WILL KNOW OF THE OUTCOME. MY ANNA ***MUST*** BE PROTECTED. IT HASN'T ***EATEN.*** IT WILL ***ESCAPE.***

CHRIS STOPS IN HIS TRACKS WHEN HE HEARS THE DOCTOR'S FRIGHTENED VOICE.

IF I DIE NOW, EVERYTHING WILL GET WORSE. I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO REACH IT. IT WILL WANT MY ***ANNA.*** WE HAVE TO ***KILL*** IT.

KILL ***WHAT?***

I KNOW IT HAS GOTTEN FREE. THREE WEEKS HAVE PASSED. GOD HELP WHOEVER ***COMES*** HERE. IT WILL BE HUNGRY. I DON'T...

REW

THEN, ANOTHER BLACKOUT.

NOT AGAIN.

I'VE ***GOT*** TO FIND SOMETHING HERE.

*UNBEKNOWNST TO CHRIS, THE DOCTOR STRUGGLED FOR ANOTHER **SEVEN DAYS** BEFORE DYING OF DEHYDRATION.*

THIS MUST BE IT.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THREE WEEKS.

FRESH MEAT.

A SOOTHING CHORUS OF CRICKETS SETS THE TONE AS **ROSEMARY BLAKE** BEGINS HER DAILY CONTEMPLATION.

GRANNIE?

AL? PLEASE, CHILD, COME IN. IT'S BEEN SOME TIME.

I'VE BEEN BUSY.

I'M SURE. THE LORD MUST HAVE MANY GLORIOUS DUTIES FOR SOME-ONE LIKE YOU.

STILL, I'M GRATEFUL FOR YOUR VISITS, NO MATTER HOW BRIEF.

NOW, PLEASE. SIT WITH ME A WHILE.

THANK YOU. I DO FEEL TIRED.

TELL ME, AL. IS HEAVEN WHAT THEY SAID IT'D BE?

I DON'T KNOW, GRANNY. I HAVEN'T BEEN THERE YET. BUT AN ANGEL DID TELL ME **YOUR** PLACE IN THE KINGDOM WAS WAITING. WHAT YOU'VE DONE ON EARTH HAS HONORED GOD.

BLESS YOU, SON, FOR THAT MESSAGE.

I'M SURE YOUR ENTRANCE IS IMMINENT.

THE LORD NEEDS SOULS LIKE YOURS.

YOU WERE A TRUE HERO.

I THOUGHT SO, TOO. BUT I WAS USED. I STILL AM.

HOW ABOUT WANDA? IS SHE ALL RIGHT?

NOT ALWAYS. SHE SAID A *DEMON* CAME TO SEE HER.* TRIED TO CONVINCE HER IT WAS *YOU*. BUT SHE WOULDN'T ALLOW IT.

SHE LOVES YOU, AL. *NOTHING* WILL STAIN HER IMAGE OF YOU.

AND THIS MAN, THIS *CREATURE*, ATTACKED TERRY. THEY'RE BOTH SCARED, AL... AFRAID IT'LL COME *BACK*.

THEY TRY AND HIDE IT FROM ME, BUT I STILL SENSE IT. MAYBE YOU CAN HELP?

THERE *MUST* BE SOME WAY YOU CAN KEEP THAT EVIL MAN AWAY.

I'M TRYING.

* ISSUE 36 -- Tom.

THANK YOU. NOW COME ALONG WITH ME. I WANT TO SHOW YOU A PICTURE OF HER LITTLE GIRL.

CHRISTMAS EVE. HARLEM, NEW YORK.

A SNOW STORM ENGULFS THE CITY, AND CONCEALS ITS GRIMY STREETS.

THE FAINT SOUNDS OF CHRISTMAS MUSIC, SIRENS, AND THE ODD GUN SHOT MINGLE IN THE NIGHT AIR.

ROWS OF BUILDINGS HOUSE FAMILIES... SOME EXTENDED, SOME **BROKEN**. THE LUCKY ONES PREPARE FOR THE EVENING'S FESTIVITIES.

SNOW-BALLS! MY FAVORITE!

NOT TOO *MANY* OF THOSE, GREGGY. YOU'LL GET A TUMMY ACHE.

JUST A COUPLE, 'KAY? I WON'T GET SICK. PROMISE.

ALL RIGHT, BUT ONLY BECAUSE IT'S A SPECIAL NIGHT.

THANKS, MOM! YOU'RE THE GREATEST. I'M GONNA GO COUNT THE PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE.

AGAIN? WELL, DON'T GET CRUMBS ALL OVER THE PLACE.

C'MON, MOM. IT'S NOT *FAIR.*

I TOLD YOU *LAST WEEK. EVERYONE'S* GOING.

LIKE IF *I* DON'T GO I'LL LOOK LIKE SUCH A *LOSER.*

I'M SORRY, NADINE. I HAVE TO WORK, AND YOU KNOW WE CAN'T AFFORD A BABYSITTER. I NEED YOU TO STAY WITH GREGGY.

THIS IS SO *TOTALLY* UNFAIR.

NADINE, *PLEASE.* I DON'T *NEED* THIS RIGHT NOW.

'BIBSY BOY,' COME GIVE MOMMA A KISS GOOD-NIGHT.

MY SILLY BOY. YOU LOOK LIKE SANTA WITH THAT POWDERED SUGAR BEARD. MAKE SURE YOU'RE IN BED EARLY TONIGHT, YOU DON'T WANT SANTA SKIPPING OUR HOUSE BECAUSE *SOMEONE'S* NOT *SLEEPING.*

I HATE THIS. LEAVING THEM ALONE TONIGHT. ESPECIALLY GREGGY.

I WISH WAITRESSING COULD MAKE ENDS MEET, BUT I NEED *THIS* JOB *TOO*. THE KIDS DESERVE A BETTER LIFE THAN I'VE HAD.

XII

Oh, GOD. I'M GONNA BE *LATE*.

WELL, PHYLLIS. I'M GLAD YOU DECIDED TO *SHOW UP*. I'M NOT SO SURE YOU NEED THIS JOB AS MUCH AS YOU SAY. *DO* YOU?

I *DO*, MRS. WHITE. I'M *SORRY*. IT WON'T HAPPEN *AGAIN*.

THE WEATHER. IT'S JUST *AWFUL*...

QUIET...

DON'T GIVE ME EXCUSES.

IF YOU'RE TOO LAZY TO WORK, I'LL FIND SOMEONE *ELSE*. *HUNDREDS* OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU WOULD *BEG* ME FOR THIS JOB.

YOU SHOULD SHOW ME MORE *RESPECT*.

ARE YOU SURE BRAD'S GONNA BE THERE?

OHMYGOD. HE'S LIKE SO COOL. LIKE THAT GUY I JUST LOVE IN THE LEE JEANS AD.

REALLY? HE ASKED IF *I* WAS GOING?

Uh... *SURE.* I'LL BE THERE. WHO *WOULDN'T?*

REMEMBER, IT'LL REWIND BY ITSELF. YOU JUST PRESS PLAY. OKAY, 'BIBSY'?

I *HATE* WHEN MOM CALLS HIM THAT. HE'S ALMOST 5. JUST 'CAUSE HE'S A PIG AT THE TABLE DOESN'T MEAN HE STILL NEEDS A BIB.

SHE AIN'T EVER GONNA LET HIM GROW UP.

I'LL BE BACK IN A FEW MINUTES.

Uh hum.

HEY, GREGGY. MOM SAID YOU COULD WATCH THIS RUDOLPH VIDEO AS MANY TIMES AS YOU WANT TONIGHT.

YA KNOW, 'CAUSE IT'S A SPECIAL NIGHT.

WOW! ISN'T MOM THE GREATEST?

WHAT AM I GOING TO **DO**? THE **FOG** IS TOO **THICK** FOR ME TO DELIVER THESE PRESENTS. ALL THE **BOYS** AND **GIRLS** WILL BE **SO** SAD.

I GUESS THERE'LL BE NO **CHRISTMAS** THIS YEAR.

YES THERE WILL, SANTA! ASK *RUDOLPH*.

RUDOLPH, YOUR NOSE IS SO **BRIGHT**. IT'S **BLINDING**.

Oh, **RUDOLPH**! YOUR **NOSE** I HAVE A **GREAT** IDEA.

ASK HIM! ASK HIM!

YOUR **BRIGHT** **NOSE** WILL LIGHT OUR WAY. **CHRISTMAS** WILL BE **SAVED**.

TOLD YA.

THERE'S TIME IF WE **HURRY**. ALL OVER THE **WORLD**, BOYS AND GIRLS **WILL** HAVE A **MERRY** **CHRISTMAS**.

RUDOLPH'S THE COOLEST.

YES, SANTA, **I** CAN LIGHT THE WAY THROUGH THIS FOG. MOM **TOLD** ME MY NOSE WAS SPECIAL.

IT *IS*.

WITH HIS MOTHER WORKING ALMOST EVERY NIGHT, HE THINKS NOTHING OF BEING LEFT ALONE WITH NADINE.

AS FOR THE MANY NIGHTS SHE **TAKES OFF**, HE THINKS NOTHING OF BEING LEFT ALONE, PERIOD.

READY TO GO, RUDOLPH? **YOU** WILL LEAD THE SLEIGH TONIGHT.

YEAH! **RUDOLPH!**

The End

TIME PASSES.

LITTLE GREGGY FINDS HIMSELF LOST IN A DREAM WORLD. IT'S CHRISTMAS DAY, AND **HUNDREDS** OF PRESENTS LIE BENEATH THE TREE.

HE PICKS UP A BIG, SHINY RED BOX AND HANDS IT TO MOM. IT'S FROM SANTA. A **HUGE** SMILE LIGHTS UP HER FACE. MOMMY WORKS SO HARD, AND SANTA KNOWS IT.

NADINE'S THERE. SO IS DADDY. **EVERYONE** LAUGHS. MOMMY SEARCHES UNDER THE TREE. LOOKING FOR A **SPECIAL** GIFT.

NOW, IT'S GREGGY'S TURN.

A FUNNY LOOKING PRESENT WITH A HUGE BOW ON IT.

A NEW GUITAR.

JUST WHAT HE ALWAYS WANTED.

THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER.

BZZZT!

KRUNCH

NADINE ..?

IS THAT YOU?

Unh? FOOTSTEPS.

LOTS OF THEM!

OH!

MAYBE... YES!

IT'S *THEM!* THE LITTLE *HELPERS!*

THAT MEANS...

...SANTA'S HERE!

HIS MILK AND COOKIES! I FORGOT TO PUT THEM OUT!

CHING

CHING

KLINK

"GOTTA HURRY! I CAN HEAR HIS *JINGLE BELLS* COMING!"

AND ALL THAT *NOISE--!* MUST BE *REINDEER* BUMPING EACH OTHER.

"I HOPE *RUDOLPH'S* UP THERE, TOO, 'CAUSE IT'S KINDA FOGGY. SANTA'LL NEED HIS *BIG RED NOSE.*"

MUST BE HARD *WORK* PULLING A GIANT SLED. SO *I* BET THEY'RE PRETTY *HUNGRY.*

SWAK!

UH- oh, TIME FOR BED. I DON'T WANT SANTA TO SKIP US.

KLANG

UNH?!

COOL. SANTA'S HELPER.

BETTER PRETEND I'M ASLEEP.

"BECAUSE SANTA KNOWS WHICH BOYS ARE NAUGHTY...

BLAM BLAM BLAM

"...AND NICE!"

"HOPE HE KNOWS *MOMMY'S* BEEN NICE, TOO. EVEN *NADINE*. BUT SHE'S NAUGHTY SOMETIMES, LIKE THAT ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN. *HE'S* ALWAYS...

"OH *NO!*

I LEFT THE MILK IN THE KITCHEN!!

KREE KNNSH

KREECH KRMP KRMP

THE COOKIES WILL MAKE THEM *THIRSTY.*

KRINNK

NOW, I'D BETTER GET BACK TO BED BEFORE...

WOW!

IT WAS SANTA!

THE *TREE!* GOTTA *CHECK* IT -- SEE HOW BIG MOM'S PRESENT IS!

*HAVING COUNTED THE GIFTS A DOZEN TIMES A DAY FOR THE PAST WEEK, GREGGY CAN SEE AT ONCE THAT **NOTHING** HAS BEEN DISTURBED.*

HE FORGOT US.

MAYBE I CAN STILL CATCH HIM.

SANTA CLAUS! RUDOLPH!! COME BACK! PLEASE... DON'T GO!

"DON'T GO.

"YOU FORGOT MY MOMMY'S PRESENT."

YOU DIDN'T!

I KNEW IT! Oh, THANK YOU, SANTA! THANK YOU!

I BET SANTA HAD TO LEAVE THIS OUTSIDE BECAUSE HE WAS TOO FAT FOR THE WINDOW.

PROBABLY DIDN'T WANT TO GET *STUCK*, LIKE *WINNIE THE POOH* DID.

NOW I'LL PUT IT RIGHT WHERE SHE CAN *SEE* IT.

I JUST CAN'T WAIT TO SEE MOMMY'S FACE.

AND, NADINE'S GOING TO HAVE A *COW* WHEN I TELL HER I SAW *SANTA* AND *RUDOLPH*.

THIS IS SO *COOL!*

THE NEXT MORNING, WHEN PHYLLIS OPENS HER UNEXPECTED FINAL PRESENT, SHE SEES HER SON BEAMING WITH PRIDE. THEN, AS SHE AND NADINE STARE IN SHOCK AT ITS CONTENTS, GREGGY TELLS THEM OF THE LATE-NIGHT VISIT.

HE RADIATES INNOCENCE AND SINCERITY. FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, PHYLLIS WRESTLES WITH HER CONSCIENCE. FINALLY, SHE COMES TO TERMS WITH HER DILEMMA.

THOUGH SHE KNOWS SHE SHOULDN'T, SHE **KEEPS** THE MONEY, DEDICATING IT TO A GREATER PURPOSE.

TO ***PHYLLIS!*** THE GREATEST NEIGHBOR ***AND*** FRIEND A PERSON COULD HOPE FOR.

WITHIN TWO DAYS, ALL THE MONEY IS SPENT ON THE OTHER POOR FAMILIES IN HER BUILDING. A WONDERFUL DINNER. TOYS FOR EVERY CHILD. IT'S A PARTY NONE WILL SOON FORGET.

'BIBSY.'

YES, MOMMA.

I'M SO ***PROUD*** OF YOU. DO YOU ***KNOW*** THAT?

YES, MOMMA.

I WANT YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR, PLEASE. ***REMEMBER*** THIS. REMEMBER ***TODAY***. ALL THE JOY IN THIS ROOM IS BECAUSE OF ***YOU***.

AND ***SANTA!***

HIM, TOO. YOU SEE, WHAT YOU'VE DONE IS GIVE ME A CHANCE TO REMIND US ALL OF WHAT'S ***IMPORTANT*** IN THIS LIFE.

"OUR ***FAMILIES***.

"OUR ***FRIENDS***.

"PLEASE, ***NEVER*** FORGET THOSE YOU CARE FOR.

"ALWAYS FIND TIME TO BE *WITH* THEM.

"AND NEVER, *EVER* DESERT THEM IN A TIME OF NEED. THAT'S HOW YOU SHOW YOU *CARE*. HOW PEOPLE KNOW YOU *LOVE* THEM."

"I'LL REMEMBER."

"MOMMY?"

"YES, GREGGY?"

"ISN'T THIS THE BEST CHRISTMAS *EVER?*"

"YES IT IS, SON. YES IT *IS*."

ISSUE 40

NEW YORK CITY.

IN THE CRACKS AND CREVASSES OF THE LOWER WEST SIDE'S ALLEYS, THERE IS A PLACE...

... A **DARK** PLACE, HIDDEN FROM SYMPATHY... A PART OF THE BOWERY MORE HOPELESS THAN EVEN **THIS** SAD DISTRICT'S REPUTATION... A PLACE BENEATH THE DIGNITY OF MOST OF THE HOMELESS.

IT'S CALLED 'RAT CITY.'

ONLY A HANDFUL OF CITY OFFICIALS EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE IT. SOME POLICE INVESTIGATORS, A COUPLE OF FIRE-FIGHTERS... NOT MANY MORE. AND ESPECIALLY NOT THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

MORE RECENTLY, IT'S BECOME HOST TO A **NEW** VISITOR.

A NEW HERO.

A KING.

MY HEAD'S **POUNDING**. THAT **WINE** THEY DRINK... I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW **CHEAP** IT IS.

HOW DO BOBBY AND BOOTSY **DO** IT EVERY NIGHT...? THEY MUST... uh?

CAN I HELP YOU GUYS?

I JUST WET MYSELF.

YAAHHH!

I-IT'S HIM!

TAKE IT EASY, SPAWN. WE WERE J-JUST ADDING TO YOUR THRONE. TRYING TO MAKE IT MORE... UM... IMPRESSIVE.

AND COMFY.

WHAT-EVER.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO TOUCH IT AGAIN. NOT EVER. UNDERSTAND?

SURE. SORRY. DIDN'T MEAN ANY HARM.

ONE OF THE BUMS GIGGLES.

WHY'S HE LAUGHING?

WHO, ELMO? DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO HIM. DRUGS FRIED HIS BRAINS YEARS AGO.

I CAN TELL.

SO WHY DON'T YOU BOYS TAKE YOUR ACT DOWN THE ROAD.

I LIKE BEING ALONE.

MAN, THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE IN MY FACE. NEEDING A PIECE OF ME. EVERYONE EXCEPT WANDA, AND SHE CAN'T STAND THE SIGHT OF ME. BUT WHAT DO I EXPECT? SHE THINKS I'M SOME KIND OF PSYCHOTIC TERROR.

NO.

EVERY TIME I GET NEAR HER, THINGS SPIN OUT OF CONTROL. *

AND NOW, CAGLIOSTRO DROPS A BOMBSHELL... THAT JASON WYNN MIGHT NOT BE THE REASON I'M DEAD.

WHICH MAKES TERRY'S ROLE IN THIS EVEN MORE CONFUSING.

WHY'S HE HEADING UP WYNN'S PERSONAL SECURITY? HE WAS A DESK JOCKEY WHEN I DIED. NOW HE'S TRYING TO KILL ME.

SLEEPING WITH MY WIFE ISN'T ENOUGH FOR HIM, I GUESS.

*ISSUES 28 AND 36 - Tom

LOST IN THOUGHT, SPAWN IS BARELY AWARE OF HIS COSTUME TENSING.

IT'S JUST THE ALCOHOL, HE TELLS HIMSELF.

SHZZ

SHZZ

LET'S GET THE HELL OUTTA HERE! IT'S BEEN ACTIVATED!

HE SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.

SHZZ

SHZZ

VWZZ

SHZZ

ZHPP

SHZZ

THE COSTUME DOESN'T LIE.

SHZZ

VWZZ

WHAT IS THIS?!

ZHPP

VWZZ

A BOOBY-TRAP!

THE BIO-MECHANICAL TENTACLES ARE STUDDED WITH ELECTRO-NEURONS. THEY DISCHARGE WITH THE EXPLOSIVE FORCE OF A SMALL BOMB.

THOSE STUDS ARE PACKING MORE THAN 50,000 VOLTS EACH. THE RESULT IS AS EXPECTED...

...THE COMPLETE SHUTDOWN OF AN ENTITY MADE ENTIRELY FROM NECRO-PLASM.

HIDING THE TRAP IN A THRONE OF DEBRIS WAS EASY. NEATNESS DIDN'T COUNT. IT WAS ALWAYS COLLAPSING UNDER HIS WEIGHT ANYWAY. THE HARD PART WAS FINDING THREE TECHS WILLING TO ACT LIKE BUMS WHILE PLANTING THE DEVICE IN THE DEMON'S DEN.

OTHERS NOW ARRIVE TO CARRY OUT THEIR PART OF THE MANIACAL MISSION.

NOW, NUMBER 4! STRIKE *QUICKLY!* THE MASTER IS UNSURE HOW LONG THE CREATURE WILL BE AFFECTED.

BRRM

KRK

KRNK

I KNOW THE PLAN, NUMBER 7. BUT POSITIONING IS IF I DON'T HIT IT RIGHT, THERE WON'T BE ENOUGH OF HIM FOR A SECOND TRY.

ALERT THE OTHERS I'LL BE COMING IN FROM BEHIND. TELL THEM TO GET THE CAMOUFLAGE READY.

WE NEED TO FINISH THIS IN THE NEXT COUPLE OF MINUTES.

EVERYONE TO YOUR PREDETERMINED STATIONS.

CONTACT TO COMMENCE IN 3...

2...

ONE!

WA-HOO!

TIED DIRECTLY TO THE EBBS AND FLOW OF THE NECRO-PLASM, SPAWN'S UNIFORM PUTS UP NO RESISTANCE. IT, TOO, HAS BEEN RENDERED USELESS.

LEAVING SPAWN FAR TOO VULNERABLE.

THE BODY JERKS FROM IMPACT AS AN INVOLUNTARY GASP ESCAPES HIS CHAPPED LIPS.

EXCELLENT! NOW THE CRATE. MAKE SURE YOU COVER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

NUMBER 12, COVER OUR TRACKS AND REBUILD THE CHAIR. THEN MEET US BACK HOME.

"WE'LL HEAD TO THE DROP POINT. HOPEFULLY, THEY'RE WAITING."

AFTER THAT, WE'LL SPLIT UP-- AND THEN RENDEZVOUS AS PLANNED.

"I'LL CONTACT THE MASTER. HE SHOULD JUST BE FINISHING HIS PREPARATIONS FOR THE DELIVERY...

"... AND THE UPCOMING *OPERATION.*"

ARE YOU SURE CYAN'S OKAY?

GOOD. SORRY I COULDN'T BE THERE TO HELP WITH THE *BANDAIDS*.

WHOEVER THIS SPAWN GUY IS, HE'S GOT SOME POWERFUL REASON TO BE MESSING WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

MOST SPECIFICALLY, WYNN.

AND US.

YEAH, THEY WANT ME TO CROSS-CHECK A COUPLE MORE *FILES* TONIGHT BEFORE I GO. DON'T WANT TO TAKE ANY CHANCES. I SWEAR, EVERYONE'S SO PARANOID.

WE'RE ALL TRYING TO BUST THIS CASE OPEN, BUT WE KEEP RUNNING INTO WALLS. JUST LIKE OUR EARLIER SEARCH. *NOTHING* MAKES SENSE.

FIRST HE *SAVES* YOU, THEN HE TELLS ME YOU'RE A *TRAITOR*.

HE *SCARES* ME, TERRY.

I KNOW WE'VE GOT PROTECTION NOW, BUT I *STILL* DON'T FEEL SAFE.

IF SPAWN CAN PENETRATE YOUR OFFICES, WHY WOULD A *HOUSE* BE A PROBLEM.

YEAH, I KNOW HE *KNOCKED* LAST TIME. THAT STILL BAFFLES ME. I... I DON'T KNOW, TERRY. EVERYTHING'S SO OUT OF CONTROL.

FIRST THEY TRY AND MAKE YOU A MURDERER. THEN THEY TRY AND PROMOTE YOU, AND THE GUY WHO PROTECTED YOU THEN WANTS TO KILL YOU. WHERE DOES THIS ***STOP***?

WAITING TO Exhale
TERRY McMILLAN

I'M SORRY. MY MIND JUST WON'T STOP RACING. AS SOON AS I STOP READING, *BAM*, I'M RIGHT BACK AT IT.

I'M NOT WILLING TO LOSE ANOTHER HUSBAND. *PLUS* THAT COSTUMED FREAK PRETENDING HE WAS AL. IT JUST MAKES ME SICK!

WHAT?

TELL YOU WHAT. TOMORROW I'LL TAKE OFF EARLY AND WE'LL GO UP THE COAST FOR A FEW DAYS. JUST THE THREE OF US.

I KNOW THEY'LL TRY TO TALK ME OUT OF IT. I'LL JUST MAKE THEM UNDERSTAND.

LITTLE TONY BILLOTO SMILES CONTENTEDLY AS HE BUSTLES ALONG. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A MONTH OF ANGLING HE'D ACTUALLY GOTTEN A **BITE**.

SINCE HE NEVER USED BAIT ON HIS MAKESHIFT FISHING POLE, THIS WAS QUITE A HUGE ACCOMPLISHMENT.

... IF HE'S WILLING TO CONTINUE MAKING **SACRIFICES**. SUCH AS **SCHOOL** ATTENDANCE. AS HE'S DONE **THREE TIMES** THIS WEEK.

AND NOW-- A **BITE**! HE'S ALREADY DREAMING UP HIS **NEXT** DAYS' EXCUSE.

Aww, NO! **NOW** WHAT?!

♪

CRAP! I DON'T NEED THIS HEADACHE.

TONY! YOU GET YOUR BUTT ***OUTTA*** HERE. **NOW!** THE ***BIGFOOT'S*** BEEN SEEN AROUND HERE-- AND HE ***LOVES*** EATING KIDS FOR DINNER!

AND TELL YOUR WELFARE BUM OF A MOTHER TO KEEP YOU ***INDOORS!***

ACTUALLY, THE LOCALS DIDN'T KNOW **WHAT** THEY WERE SEARCHING FOR--

--BUT **SOMETHING** HAD LEFT A BLOODY TRAIL WITH TWO DEAD COWS AND A HANDFUL OF DOGS. THEY ALL AGREED IT HAD TO BE SOME KIND OF **ANIMAL**. A **BEAR**. MAYBE A CRAZED **COUGAR**. **WHATEVER**.

SO, THE **SHERIFF** WAS BROUGHT IN.

NOW, ALL THAT REMAINS IS TO **FIND** THE BEAST... AND A SIGHTING HAD BEEN CALLED IN, LESS THAN AN HOUR EARLIER.

GUYS! **HEY!** I'VE **GOT** SOME-THING HERE!

A FRESH KILL.

IT'S STILL WARM--WHAT'S ***LEFT*** OF IT. BLOOD HASN'T EVEN COAGULATED YET. NOW HOW IN THE HELL DID IT GET HERE WITH NO ***FOOTPRINTS*** AROUND?

MAYBE BIGFOOT IS A LIGHT-WEIGHT.

CAN THE JOKES, FRED. THIS IS BAD. I'VE NEVER ***SEEN*** A KILLING LIKE THIS BEFORE.

ROY! HEY-- WHERE'D YOUR DOGS TAKE OFF TO?

THE WOODS. CAUGHT A WHIFF OF SOMETHING.

GOD.

WHAT WAS THAT?

LISTEN.

SOUNDS LIKE THEY'VE CORNERED IT.

WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF WOOF!

ROY KNOWS.

THE BARKING HAD SUDDENLY SHIFTED INTO HIGH-PITCHED YELPS.

HE'D HEARD THE SOUND BEFORE-- THE **LAST** TIME A BEAR HAD COME ONTO HIS LAND.

THERE IT IS.

HOLY JEEZ. LOOK AT THE ***SIZE*** OF IT.

THE BLACK TERROR STANDS NEARLY THIRTEEN FEET AT THE SHOULDER.

ITS BODY, NOW ENTWINED WITH HARD-CASE METAL, IS BARELY VISIBLE IN THE DARKNESS.

IT NEEDS TIME TO FEED.

OH... OH... OH... IT *IS* BIGFOOT!

ROY! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING *NOW...?!*

SHUT UP! THIS THING'S GOT *MY DOGS*... BUT NOT FOR *LONG*.

AFTER ROY'S FIRST SHOT, HIS FRIENDS ARE QUICK TO JOIN IN.

THEY'RE NOT QUITE SURE WHERE TO AIM. A FEW BULLETS FIND THEIR MARK.

THE BEAST RECOILS.

REGAINING ITS BALANCE, THE CREATURE TURNS. SLOWLY. THEN, THE APE IS PRESENTED AN **OPPORTUNITY** WHILE SHOTGUNS AND PISTOLS ARE FRANTICALLY **RELOADED**.

KILLING THEM WOULD BE SO EASY-- BUT THE GREAT PRIMATE CHOOSES **ANOTHER** COURSE OF ACTION.

RETREAT.

IT'S GONE IN A HEARTBEAT... SUCKED INTO THE FOREST'S CAMOUFLAGE.

SOMEONE RADIO THE SHERIFF!! GIVE HIM A FIX ON THAT THING.

WE'LL CLEAN UP BACK HERE.

C'MON, ROY, IT'S NO USE. THEY WON'T MAKE IT. ***LOOK*** AT 'EM. WE HAVE TO PUT THEM OUT OF THEIR PAIN.

SHERIFF? THIS IS ANDY. SOME GODDAMN **APE THING** JUST BLEW A PATH THROUGH US.

WHAT?!

IT'S HEADED FOR OAKRIDGE CREEK.

ONE OF THE COUNTY'S BEST FISHING HOLES...

THIS TIME FOR SURE! COME ON, YOU STUPID FISH, BITE! LIKE BEFORE.

MAN, THAT FELT GOOD!

TONY SHOULD HAVE LISTENED THE FIRST TIME. "GO HOME," HE WAS TOLD. BUT HE COULDN'T.

NOT AFTER ALL HIS LUCK. HE DID GET A BITE, AFTER ALL.

RODNEY, I'M HEADING SOUTH THROUGH THE OLD LOGGING ROAD. I WANT TO CUT THIS CREATURE OFF AT...

WHAT?!

!

KRUNCH

THE PROJECT WAS NAMED "BIO-MECHANIC NEUROLOGICAL TRANS-FERRAL SYSTEM".

THE MELDING OF FLESH AND WEAPONS.

THEY WERE TRYING TO BUILD A WALKING TANK. ONE THEY COULD CONTROL. IT SUCCEEDED.

ALMOST.

THE CODENAME CAME A BIT LATER. SINCE THIS WAS A CYBER-NETIC GORILLA, IT ONLY MADE SENSE:

CY-GOR

THAT'S ITS NAME NOW. CY-GOR.

...THOUGH EVERYONE IN THIS COUNTY WILL CALL IT SOMETHING ELSE.

THANKS... BIGFOOT.

AS ONE CREATURE SLIPS BACK INTO THE BLACK-NESS...

...ANOTHER COMES FORTH.

"Ah, GOOD. THE DRUGS ARE WORKING. HE'S COMING TO. I WANT HIM TO *SEE* THIS FOR HIMSELF. SEE *EXACTLY* WHAT HELL HAS *DONE* TO HIM."

Uhnnh.

WHERE AM I? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

SOME FRIGGIN' FRANKEN-STEIN CASTLE, COMPLETE WITH CLOAKED HENCHMEN.

DON'T STRAIN TOO HARD, HELL-SPAWN.

IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.

YOU SEE, I'VE FIGURED IT OUT. WHAT YOU'RE *MADE* OF. HOW YOU GET YOUR *POWERS*.

IT'S TRUE THE DEVIL *GAVE* THEM TO YOU, BUT NOW YOUR STRENGTH RESIDES *WITHIN*. YOU'VE BECOME A *HOLDING TANK*, IF YOU WILL, OF *EVIL*.

CURSE!

WHAT ARE YOU BABBLING ABOUT?

YOU REMEMBER ME. THAT'S GOOD. *VERY* GOOD. BECAUSE I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN YOU *EITHER*.

HOW YOU NAILED ME TO A WALL. IGNORED MY PLEAS. LEFT ME TO *ROT!* YOU *WANTED* ME TO DIE, DIDN'T YOU?

SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU.

AND YOUR FRIEND *SANSKER*. *HE* WANTED ME DEAD, *TOO*.*

*ISSUE 32.--Tom.

NOW IT'S **MY** TURN.

AS YOU'VE BEEN OBSERVING, MY ASSISTANTS ARE ***QUITE*** BUSY, EACH WITH A SPECIFIC JOB.

ONE CAREFULLY STORES EACH EXTRACTION.

ONE CATALOGUES AND INDEXES THE INFORMATION.

OTHERS MONITOR THE ***COSTUME***. AND DON'T BOTHER TRYING TO DEDUCE HOW I ***SEPARATED*** THE TWO OF YOU. BELIEVE ME, IT WAS A CHALLENGE.

BZZ!

THE SAME IS TRUE OF YOUR ***CHAINS***... THOUGH THEY'RE SHOWING A GREAT DEAL MORE ***SPIRIT*** IN RESISTING THE ***DISSECTION***.

PLIP

DISSECTION?

MORE OF AN *AUTOPSY*, ACTUALLY. BUT AS WITH ANY UNTRIED PROCEDURE, THERE ARE SIDE EFFECTS. THE SURGICAL SEPARATION OF TWO JOINED ENTITIES HAS *ALWAYS* BEEN PROBLEMATIC, AND IT WAS NO DIFFERENT WITH YOU AND YOUR *COSTUME*.

STILL, THE OPERATION IS *FAR* FROM OVER-- AND NOW THAT YOU'RE AWAKE, I *SINCERELY* HOPE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO *FEEL* THE GRAND FINALE:

THE SEARING PAIN AS I REMOVE YOUR ***LIVING BRAIN!***

NEXT ISSUE--
THE CONCLUSION!
... by McFARLANE AND CAPULLO!

ARMAGEDDON.

*THE PLACE WHERE IT ALL ENDS: ULTIMATE **GOOD** VERSUS ULTIMATE **EVIL** IN THE LAST BEST EXAMPLE OF HOLY WARFARE.*

*THE WINNER, IT HAS BEEN PROPHESIED, WILL REIGN ETERNALLY. SUCH A PRIZE IS COVETED BY **BOTH** SIDES, THE SUPERNATURALLY OPPOSING CAMPS WHOSE PHILOSOPHIES INSPIRE US HUMANS. WHILE SOME OF US SEEK HARMONY WITH ALL PEOPLE AND THINGS, OTHERS WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO THWART AND HUMILIATE THEM. AND DAY BY DAY, HEAVEN AND HELL **NUDGE** US AS THEY'VE DONE FOR UNTOLD CENTURIES... **GROOMING** US INTO ARMIES WHICH WILL CHARGE HEADLONG INTO BATTLE UNTIL THE ENEMY HAS, AT LAST, BEEN **SILENCED**.*

*NOW, TODAY, SOME SAY THAT THE **END TIMES** HAVE BEGUN. BEHAVIOR AMONG MANY PEOPLE HAS BECOME MORE **EXTREME**, AND THE RECRUITMENT OF SOULS HAS GAINED A NEW **INTENSITY**. AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH, EACH SOUL IS WELCOMED TO BOTH HEAVEN AND HELL. FROM THIS POOL OF MILLIONS THE TWO SIDES SEEK NEW CANDIDATES. MOST ARE WORTHY BUT **UNREMARKABLE**... ACCEPTED, WELCOMED, ABSORBED INTO THE ASSEMBLED WHOLE. AND OCCASIONALLY, A **JEWEL** WORKS ITS WAY TO THE FORE.*

*THEY ARE GIVEN **POWER**. A NEW **LIFE**. ANOTHER CHANCE TO USE EARTH AS A **LEARNING FACILITY**. IN HEAVEN, THIS SORT ARE CALLED "**ANGELS**". IN HELL, THEY ARE KNOWN AS "**SPAWN**".*

*LIEUTENANT COLONEL **AL SIMMONS** WAS SUCH A FIND. HE HAD THE RIGHT WIRING. THE **GIFT**. HELL COULD ONLY SMILE WHEN HE CAME DOWN THE CHUTE. FOR YOU SEE, A GREAT ARMY DEMANDS GREAT **LEADERS**. AL SIMMONS' LIFE SHOWED HIS POTENTIAL. DUTY FIRST. BLIND OBEDIENCE TO HIS SUPERIORS, WITH A GOOD SENSE OF IMPROVISATION IN THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THEIR GOALS. IN ALL, A CREDIT TO HIS OFFICIALLY-SANCTIONED **ASSASSINS' TRAINING**.*

*BETTER YET, HE HAD COME **WILLINGLY** INTO THE DOMAIN OF SIN. HIS LOVE FOR HIS WIFE INSPIRED HIS INFERNAL BARGAIN.*

*NOW, HE'S AN OFFICER-IN-TRAINING, AND THE TIME HAS COME AGAIN FOR HELL TO PUT HIM THROUGH HIS PACES... TO SEE IF HE IS TRULY **WORTHY** OF HIS POST. AND, IF EVERYTHING GOES RIGHT, THIS SPAWN WILL LEAD THE LEGIONS OF DARKNESS THROUGH A GREAT AND DECISIVE BATTLE AND INTO **VICTORY**.*

ALL HE HAS TO DO IS PASS THE TESTS.

SURVIVE THE MADNESS.

HOW DOES IT *FEEL*, HELLSPAWN? TO BE HELPLESS. WITH NO *LIMBS*. WAITING FOR THE NEXT WAVE OF *PAIN* TO POUR OVER YOU.

TO BE A *RARE OBJECT* IN THE HANDS OF A *SUPERIOR*.

IT'S NOT RIGHT, *IS* IT? THAT'S WHAT I KEPT TELLING MYSELF *EVERY DAY* I HUNG IN YOUR ALLEY. EVERY *NIGHT* I WAS TORTURED IN THAT *BELL TOWER*. *

* ISSUE 32 -- Tom -

YEARS OF STUDY HAVE GIVEN ME GREAT *INSIGHT* INTO THE ORIGIN OF SIN. AND *EVIL*. WHERE DO THEY GAIN THEIR POWER?

WHY, FROM *WITHIN*.

YOU ARE MADE OF *NECRO-PLASM*. THE FLESH AND BLOOD OF *HELL*, IF YOU WILL. AND WITHIN THAT FLESH DWELLS HATRED. ANGER. LUST. ALL THE *DEADLY SINS* OF MANKIND.

THOUGH GOD *FORSOOK* ME IN MY HOUR OF NEED, IT IS STILL MY MISSION TO *DESTROY* ANY *WICKEDNESS*.

PAIN, YOU SEE, IS A GREAT *STIMULUS*. IT CLEARS THE MIND OF *DISTRACTIONS*. THIS ALLOWS THE ACCEPTANCE OF *KNOWLEDGE*.

YOU MUST LEARN ABOUT YOUR ENEMY BEFORE YOU CAN *DESTROY* IT.

IF I CAN DISCOVER YOUR SECRET--*CONTROL* IT--THEN *I* WILL HAVE POWER OVER *SATAN*.

THEN, HE WILL HAVE TO THINK TWICE BEFORE SENDING *ANOTHER* OF HIS AGENTS TO EARTH *EVER AGAIN.*

WHILE YOU FIGHT THE OPERATION, CONSIDER THAT YOUR DEATH WILL BE THE SALVATION OF THE *MILLIONS* OF SOULS DAMNED TO *DARKNESS.*

EACH PART OF YOUR BODY IS NOW BEING PREPARED FOR SHIPMENT--TO BE STUDIED BY SOME OF THE GREATEST MINDS ON EARTH.

EACH HAS A PASSION FOR PURITY FOR *GOOD.*

BUT THERE ARE STILL A FEW DETAILS TO BE IRONED OUT.

SO I MUST LEAVE YOU.

BUT DON'T WORRY, THE *DRUGS* WILL HOLD YOU UNTIL I CAN FINISH YOUR *DISSECTION.*

YOU'D SEEN IT BEFORE. PLENTY OF TIMES.

A PIECE LYING HERE.

ANOTHER, HANGING THERE.

IT'S WHAT WAR'S ABOUT. MESSAGES. THE LOUDER, THE BETTER.

YOU WERE ONLY 21 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME.

IT BOTHERED YOU THAT SOMEONE SO YOUNG COULD TUNE OUT THE HORRORS.

EVEN WHEN THEY HAPPENED TO YOU.

THE CAPTAIN SAID THE AREA WAS SECURED. YOU AND TIM WERE TO CARVE A PATHWAY NORTHEAST.

THE AMBUSH CAUGHT YOU BOTH FLAT-FOOTED. BUT THE TWO OF YOU HELD OUT, SAYING NOTHING OTHER THAN TO CUSS YOUR ENEMY.

HE WANTED TO KNOW YOUR UNIT'S NEW MISSION...

... DEMANDING TO KNOW, AGAIN AND AGAIN-- AND EACH TIME, YOU HELD SILENCE. YOUR PARTNER PAID THE PRICE.

TIM **BEGGED** YOU TO SAY NOTHING. SAID HE WOULD RATHER **DIE** THAN BETRAY HIS FRIENDS.

IT TOOK ALMOST TEN HOURS BEFORE TIM STOPPED MOVING.

NOW IT WAS **YOUR** TURN, AND ALL YOU COULD THINK ABOUT WAS HOW YOU'D GIVE **ANYTHING** TO BE ABLE TO EXACT REVENGE.

IT'S THE FIRST INSTANCE YOU CAN RECALL OF WANTING TO **MURDER**.

POW

HIS NAME WAS 'SAIGON,' THE SOLDIER WHO SAVED YOU. AFTER THAT DAY, YOU LEARNED TO KILL TOGETHER.

SO, WHAT'S THE STATUS OF THINGS TODAY?

THE *PENTAGON* AND THE *BUREAU* ARE STILL CREEPING AROUND. IT SEEMS SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT QUITE *SATISFIED* WITH THE RANDOM ATTACK THEORY.

WE'VE DONE OUR BEST TO QUELL ANY DAMAGING SPECULATION. THEIR FINAL QUESTIONING HAS BEEN DELAYED UNTIL YOUR RELEASE FROM THE HOSPITAL.

THEY WANT TO MEET WITH YOU AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE.

SCREW THOSE BOY SCOUTS! GET ME HOME.

YES, SIR.

*HOUNDED BY GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATORS SINCE HIS C.I.A. OFFICE WAS ATTACKED, **JASON WYNN** HAS DONE A SUPERB JOB OF FABRICATING LIES CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE TRUTH TO SATISFY MOST QUERIES.*

*BUT IT'S HIS **INTERNATIONAL** STANDING WITHIN A **SECRET CARTEL** THAT IS HIS BIGGEST CONCERN.*

HEH-HMP!

ABOUT *TIME* YOU SHOWED. I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK I'D BEEN *STOOD UP*... BY A *CRIPPLE*.

HEE HEE! GET IT?

HOW THE *HELL* DID YOU GET IN?

MY, MY. A LITTLE *EDGY*, ARE WE? LOOK, WYNN, YOU SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED WITH *ME* ANYMORE.

I *DO* THINGS. *ACCEPT* IT.

LIKE THIS WHOLE *SPAWN* FIASCO. I *TOLD* YOU I'D TAKE CARE OF THINGS, DIDN'T I?

I'M NOT IMPRESSED SO FAR.

YES YOU ARE. OTHERWISE YOU'D HAVE TRIED TO KILL ME *ALREADY*.

BUT THE *PROBLEM*, MY DEAR JASON, IS THAT YOU HAVEN'T *LIVED UP* TO *YOUR* PART OF THE DEAL. SEE, IF IT WASN'T FOR *ME*, THOSE GOVERNMENT LADS WOULD'VE STRUNG YOU UP BY YOUR *BALLS* LAST WEEK.

INSTEAD, I'VE LEFT A COUPLE LOOSE ENDS DANGLING THAT CAN EASILY BE CAPPED...

...WHICH THEY'LL *BE* IF YOU GET YOUR *ACT* TOGETHER.

I'VE ASKED YOU FOR ONLY *ONE THING*: HARASS THE *CRAP* OUTTA MY PAL SPAWN. LYING ON YOUR BACK IN A HOSPITAL AIN'T *DOING* IT FOR ME.

TERRY. WANDA. GRANDMA BLAKE. REMEMBER *THEM*? THE NOOSE ISN'T AROUND THEIR NECKS *TIGHT* ENOUGH.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF THEM.

I'M *COUNTING* ON IT.

SOUTH. THAT'S THE DIRECTION IT'S BEEN HEADING. FOR FIVE DAYS.

EATING OCCASIONALLY ALONG THE WAY. ALWAYS MELDING WITH THE SHADOWS OF THE ROAD-SIDE GROWTH.

AND NEVER TRAVELING DURING DAYLIGHT.

THAT WOULD BE **BAD.**

THE CREATURE **DOES** KNOW RIGHT FROM WRONG.

BERNIE'S BAR & GRILL

I LOVE YOU, SUE.

NO YOU DON'T. YOU'RE ***DRUNK.***

YES I AM.

SO PLEASE, BABY, TELL ME YOU NEED ME, TOO.

Oh, FOR THE LOVE OF PETE!! ***CONTROL*** YOURSELF. AND YOUR ***BREATH...*** *whew!*

C'MON. LET'S GO INSIDE. IT'S TOO ***CRAMPED*** BACK HERE.

WITH THE WINDOWS ROLLED UP, THE YOUNG COUPLE'S ACTIVITIES CAN SEND CONFLICTING MESSAGES.

SUCH AS POSSIBLE RAPE.

A PERFECT SOLDIER. THAT'S WHAT THE VARIOUS TECHNICIANS ATTEMPTED TO CREATE.

CYBERNETIC APPENDAGES WERE SURGICALLY GRAFTED TO FLESH. THE FIRST EXPERIMENTS FAILED MISERABLY. A NORMAL MAN COULDN'T TOLERATE THE **PAIN** ONCE THE **DRUGS** WORE OFF.

ANOTHER SUBJECT WAS NEEDED. MAN'S EVOLUTIONARY COUSIN. THE **APE.**

ONLY THE BIGGEST AND **STRONGEST** OF THE ILLEGALL IMPORTED SIMIANS WERE SENT TO THE LAB.

ONES CAPABLE OF ENDURING THE ATROCITIES.

AFTER INCORPORATING STEEL ALLOY JOINTS WITH CARTILAGE AND MUSCLE, THE NEXT STEP WAS TO SEE IF THE PRIMATE'S BODY WOULD ACCEPT THE FOREIGN PARTS.

IT DID.

THEN CAME THE CRUX OF THE ENTIRE OPERATION: TRANSFERRAL OF A HUMAN MIND, GRADUALLY, INTO THE BEAST'S CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE IDEAL WAS A 90% HUMAN TO 10% APE RATIO -- JUST ENOUGH LOWER PRIMATE TO WITHSTAND THE EVER-PRESENT PAIN.

BUT, WHEN THE BALANCE HIT 50/50, SOMETHING WENT WRONG.

DRASTICALLY WRONG!

NOW, THOSE WHO **BANKROLLED** THE VENTURE HAVE SEEN THEIR ASSET JUST UP AND LEAVE.

THEY WANT IT **BACK.**

INTACT.

PUT THAT ***AWAY,*** KURT. YOU KNOW THEY DON'T WANT ANY ***DAMAGE*** DONE TO THE MONKEY.

JUST A PRECAUTION. IN CASE SOME-BODY POKES THEIR NOSE WHERE IT DON'T BELONG.

GIVE IT A REST, KURT. WE WERE HIRED TO ***DETAIN*** IT, IF POSSIBLE. THE ***FIELD OPS*** WILL SEE TO ITS ***CAPTURE.***

WE JUST NEED TO ***PINPOINT*** IT, THEN WE'RE ***THROUGH.*** SO QUIT LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

OUR CLIENTS ARE PISSY ENOUGH AS IT IS. HAVEN'T SEEN THEM LIKE ***THIS*** IN ***YEARS.***

AND THEY ***SURE*** AIN'T GOING TO BE TOO HAPPY THAT THEIR MONKEY-BOY MIGHT COME INTO ***CIVILIAN CONTACT.***

THAT'LL DRAW UNNECESSARY ATTENTION.

HOPE THE CREATURE'S SMART ENOUGH TO ***AVOID*** THAT TOWN.

IT WASN'T.

C'MON, BABY.

JUST A BIT CLOSER.

THAT SHOULD DO IT.

DON'T KNOW IF THIS'LL WORK, BUT WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

TWENTY MINUTES. THAT'S HOW LONG IT TOOK HIM TO INCH THE GURNEY A COUPLE YARDS.

ANOTHER HALF DOZEN MINUTES PASS.

THE KNIFE NEARLY SLIPS OUT TWICE, AND THEN DOES ACTUALLY FALL WHEN ITS TASK IS COMPLETE.

KLANG!

HAVE TO CONCENTRATE...

NO! IT'S GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION!

IT TAKES ANOTHER 3 MINUTES FOR MIND AND LIMBS TO GET IN SYNC.

THUD!

DAMN!

THUK!

DAMN! THE DRUGS MADE ME TOO WEAK!

THOUGH HE WASN'T CONVINCED THE PLOY WOULD WORK, SPAWN IS CRUSHED BY ITS **FAILURE**.

EVEN HAD HE SUCCEEDED, IT MIGHT NOT HAVE MATTERED-- FOR JUST THEN, CURSE RETURNS.

I WANT EACH PIECE PROPERLY HANDLED AND SEALED SO THAT THERE IS NO LOSS OF LIQUID IN ANY OF THE CONTAINERS.

DOUBLE-CHECK THE BOUYANCY LEVELS. I DON'T NEED ANY TISSUE GETTING UNDULY HARMED.

THE DATA WE GLEAN FROM THESE DEMON PARTS MUST BE AS UNCORRUPTED AS POSSIBLE.

ESPECIALLY THE FINAL AND GREATEST TREASURE-- HIS BRAIN!

THEREIN LIES THE KEY TO UNLOCK ALL MY ANSWERS.

RESIDING SOMEWHERE IN HIS SUBCONSCIOUS IS THE REASON FOR EVIL.

SO LOOK AROUND ONE LAST TIME, THESE WILL BE THE *FINAL IMAGES* YOUR VILE MIND SHALL EVER PERCEIVE.

YOUR DECAPITATION WILL CULMINATE YEARS OF RESEARCH. A *LIFETIME* OF WORK IS FINALLY TO BE REWARDED.

I'LL MAKE THIS AS *PAINFUL* AS POSSIBLE.

HA-HA HA

WHAT'S THIS?

YOUR WRIST WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SLIP THROUGH THE SPECIAL SENSORS.

BUT I MUST *COMMEND* YOU. SELF-AMPUTATION IS AN ACT REQUIRING *COURAGE.*

YOU'VE LOST A HAND. *IMPRESSIVE.* BUT YOUR SHACKLES INSTANTLY NEGATE SUCH ESCAPES.

BY NOW YOU'VE NOTICED THAT *I* REMOVED *MY* REMAINING ARM SINCE LAST WE MET.

THE VOICE OF THE CURSE IS SUDDENLY DROWNED OUT.

A HAIRLINE FRACTURE IN THE HOLDING TANK WAS ALL THE UNIFORM NEEDED.

SPAWN'S HAND HAD DONE ITS JOB.

SO NOW, LIKE SOME RABID, STARVING BEAST RELEASED FROM ITS CAGE, THE UNIFORM GOES **WILD.**

FLAILING. SCREAMING. **DESTROYING.**

IT SEEKS ITS HOST BODY. THE ONE THING THAT WILL **NOURISH** IT.

THEN, AWARENESS GROWS. ITS HOST IS NOT GONE, ONLY **FRAGMENTED.**

IT RAMPAGES NOW WITH **DIRECTION,** SWALLOWING THE FORMER AL SIMMONS PIECE BY PIECE,

LIMB BY LIMB.

SLOWLY, FLUIDLY, AS IF ASSEMBLING SOME FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER FROM THE GUTS ON OUT.

WHEN THE FINAL APPENDAGE IS INGESTED, THE LIVING COSTUME TURNS TO ITS CAPTOR.

PAIN.

THE CURSE IS ABOUT TO LEARN THE MEANING OF THE WORD.

DAY BREAKS.

FINALLY SATISFIED WITH ITS REVENGE, THE COSTUME FOCUSES WITHIN. TWITCHES. JIGS. SHAKES. GENTLY **MODIFIES** ITS RUSHED ASSEMBLY OF ITS HOST.

THEN, LIKE A SATANIC RAGGEDY ANDY, SPAWN RISES.

THE COSTUME'S REVISIONS WERE SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL.

DON'T *GLOAT*, DEMON. IT'S NOT *OVER*.

Oh. YES, IT IS.

THEN YOU'RE MORE IGNORANT THAN I THOUGHT.

FIRST RULE OF THUMB, HELLSPAWN: *NEVER* START A WAR UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING TO...

DIE

FOR

IT.

THE AFTERMATH--
NEXT ISSUE!

THE THING IS TRAVELLING AT **EXTRAORDINARY** SPEED... RED-HOT BEFORE IT'S GONE A MILE.

SPINNING...

...TWISTING...

...CONTORTING...

...ITS PULPY INTERIOR IS PROTECTED BY AN OUTER SHELL, NOW UNEXPECTEDLY DISPLAYING THE ENDURANCE OF VANADIUM STEEL.

AND THOUGH STILL WEAK FROM ITS SEVERANCE, IT DID MANAGE TO LOCATE AND SWALLOW EVERYTHING.

THE ARMS. LEGS. TORSO.

EVEN THE HEAD.

EVERY PIECE WAS ACCOUNTED FOR.

THE HOST **MUST** BE FUNCTIONAL, **MUST** BENEFIT THE SYSTEM. IT MUST RECEIVE **PROTECTION.**

SHRRR

SO THAT'S WHAT IT DELIVERED, ARRANGING ITSELF INTO AN AERODYNAMIC SHAPE-- A RE-ENTRY SYSTEM FROM HELL.

THE PARTING SHOT HIT WITH THE FORCE OF AN IMPACTING **COMET**, BLASTING THE LIVING UNIFORM AND ITS PASSENGER AWAY. WITHIN SECONDS, THEY'RE BLOWN FROM THE CURSE'S RURAL WEST VIRGINIA CASTLE TO A BED OF WINTER-DEADENED GROWTH TWO MILES AWAY. THE COSTUME'S HELL-BORN INSTINCTS FOR SELF-PRESERVATION HAD SERVED ITS DOMINANT FUNCTION:

...THE CONTINUED PROTECTION OF THE FORM INSIDE. ITS **HOST.**

AL SIMMONS. **SPAWN.**

LIKE A SCARECROW NOW, WITHOUT THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE TO BEAR ITS OWN WEIGHT, SPAWN RISES...

NOT BY HIS OWN DESIRE, BUT BE-CAUSE HIS COS-TUME **COMPELS** HIM TO DO SO.

CONNECTICUT.

...SO, UNLESS SOME OF THE REPORTS IN THIS FILE ARE FABRICATIONS, WE'VE GOT QUITE IMPLICIT CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ***CHIEF BANKS*** AND THE MURDER OF THE ***JENNINGS*** CHILD.

CRIPES! I DIDN'T THINK BANKS WAS ***THAT*** COMPETENT.

UNFORTU-NATELY, SIR, IT APPEARS THAT HE WAS.

THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMETHING FISHY ABOUT THE WHOLE ***BILLY KINCAID*** TIMELINE. KINCAID WAS BEING DETAINED REGARDING ***ANOTHER*** CHILD'S DISAPPEARANCE. THE INVESTIGATOR IN CHARGE WAS ABRUPTLY 'TRANSFERRED' BY BANKS TO ANOTHER CASE, FOR NO STATED REASON... AND KINCAID WAS THEN RELEASED ON HIS OWN RECOGNISENCE.

HE SOON HEADED IN A CONSPICUOUS PATH TOWARD SENATOR JENNINGS' DAUGHTER.

KINCAID STOOD OUT LIKE A ***SORE THUMB*** IN THAT NEIGHBORHOOD. THE CLERK AT THE 7-11 IDENTIFIED HIM WITHOUT HESITATION. IT'S AS IF SOMEONE POINTED HIM IN THE SENATOR'S DIRECTION--

--WITH THE ***CLEAR*** INTENTION OF SENDING JENNINGS A MESSAGE BY KIDNAPPING HIS ***DAUGHTER.***

"AND THEN ***SLAUGHTERING*** HER."

"YES, SIR."

"BILLY'S ***DEAD*** LONG SINCE, SO HE AIN'T GIVING US ANY ANSWERS."

"NO, SIR. BUT IF WE CAN FOLLOW UP A FEW MORE LEADS, IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THE EVIDENCE WILL ***CONCLUSIVELY*** LINK CHIEF BANKS TO THE MURDER OF THE SENATOR'S DAUGHTER."

...STILL, I'M A BIT CONFUSED AS TO ***WHY*** BILLY WAS LEFT ALIVE AFTER THE JENNINGS MURDER. ELIMINATING HIM ***THEN***... PERHAPS SCAPEGOATING AN "OVER-ZEALOUS ROOKIE COP" FOR GOOD MEASURE... WOULD SURELY HAVE CLOSED THE CASE AND BURIED ANY HINT OF CONSPIRACY. ***UNLESS*** HE WAS BEING HELD AS AN 'ACE', IF THE HEAT GOT TURNED UP...

SO YOU DON'T THINK ***SPAWN*** IS A PART OF THIS. *SLURRP*

IT DOESN'T APPEAR SO. BUT IT DOES BEG THE QUESTION OF HOW ***HE*** ACQUIRED THE 'SECRET' FILE ON BANKS THAT HE GAVE US.*

WE'LL FIGURE THAT OUT LATER. RIGHT NOW WE'VE GOT BANKS NAILED TO THE WALL. I DON'T WANT HIM WRIGGLING LOOSE.

HE WON'T. MEANWHILE, ***WHO*** WAS HE WORKING FOR? SOMEONE AT THE ***C.I.A.*** WHO NEEDED THE ODD DOMESTIC JOB DONE? THAT'S LIKELY, GIVEN BANKS' TELEPHONE RECORDS. IT'LL PROBABLY TAKE ANOTHER YEAR TO TRACK ALL ***THAT*** DOWN.

THAT'S WHAT I'M THINKING.

OH! HELLO, SAM. NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN.

GULP

DON'T GET UP. I'M JUST ON MY WAY OUT FOR A RUN.

YOU MAKING ANY HEADWAY ON YOUR CASE?

BELIEVE ME, WE'RE TRYING, SWEET-HEART.

BLAH *BLAH* BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH *BL* BLAH B BLAH BLA BLAH

LORD HAVE MERCY

SO, DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT THEORY, SIR?

HUH? SORRY. I... *um*, WASN'T LISTENING.

=*puff*= COME ON, LEGS! ***MOVE! MOVE!!***

=*puff puff*= GOT TO BEAT 'EM TO THE MEADOW. I ***ALWAYS*** LOSE THEM THERE!

CEREDO, WEST VIRGINIA, WHERE LIFE MOVES AT A PACE TO WHICH NEW YORKERS ARE UNACCUSTOMED.

HE'S PAT SHAUNESSY--THE CLASS GEEK. EVERY WEDNESDAY AFTER SCHOOL THEY FOLLOW HIM. WHEN HE COMES OUT OF THE STORE AFTER MAKING HIS NEW PURCHASES, THE CHASE BEGINS.

IT'S ALMOST BECOME A RITUAL.

Oh PLEASE. PLEASE. PLEASE.

I HOPE NONE GOT BENT!

KEEP OUT!

GOT TO CHECK THEM OVER. BUT NOT TILL I GET TO THE HIDEOUT.

IT'S SAFE THERE.

I SWEAR, IF EVEN ONE CORNER IS WRECKED, I'M GOING TO TELL THEIR MOMS.

LIKE A COILED PYTHON, IT ATTACKS. QUICKLY. FORCEFULLY.

THE CLOAK DOESN'T LIKE INTRUDERS.

DON'T HURT ME. I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU WANT. *ANYTHING!*

SENSING THAT THE BOY POSES NO THREAT, THE CAPE RELEASES HIM.

GET OUT OF HERE, BOY! BEFORE YOU GET HURT.

WHAT D'YOU MEAN? ARE YOU OKAY, MISTER? YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.

I'M FINE. JUST LEAVE. DON'T ANGER IT.

DID YOU HEAR ME? I SAID IT MIGHT... I MIGHT JUST HURT YOU. I DON'T HAVE CONTROL.

OF WHAT?

YOUR COSTUME? YOU MEAN IT'S *ALIVE!!?* JUST LIKE *VENOM'S?!*

THAT MEANS YOU'RE A *SUPER-HERO*. A REAL *LIVE* ONE.

NOT QUITE.

A MOMENT PASSES, AND SPAWN FEELS THE LIVERY RELAX.

THIS IS SO GREAT! I MEAN, YOU'RE A *HERO* JUST LIKE IN MY COMICS. HERE, LET ME SHOW YOU MY NEWEST ONES. JUST GOT THEM TODAY.

TOMMY AND HIS GANG OF BULLIES TRY TO STEAL THEM EVERY WEEK.

HEY! ARE YOU PART OF A *TEAM?*

EXCUSE ME?

YOU KNOW, LIKE YOUNGBLOODS. THE AVENGERS. FANTASTIC FOUR. THE X-MEN.

YOU LIKE COMICS? I *LOVE* 'EM!! ESPECIALLY THE MUTANTS. THEY'RE THE COOLEST. THOUGH IT'S TOUGH KEEPING TRACK OF ALL THEIR BOOKS.

Y'KNOW, X-FORCE USED TO BE MY FAVORITE, 'TIL TONY DANIELS LEFT. IT'S STILL *OKAY*, I GUESS.

AND SPIDEY. I LIKE HIM TOO. CRAWLING AROUND BUILDINGS AND STUFF.

WUZ UP PAT SNIF

WOULDN'T THAT BE *AWE*-SOME? WELL, WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER? YOU PART OF A GROUP, OR WHAT?

NO.

THAT'S OKAY. *LOTS* OF NEAT HEROES STAY TO THEMSELVES. SUPERMAN. HULK. THE MAXX. SAVAGE DRAGON. EVEN THE PITT.

SURE WISH *THAT* BOOK CAME OUT MORE OFTEN.

EVEN BATMAN. HAVE YOU SEEN ANY OF THE MOVIES?

WHAT MOVIES?

THE BATMAN ONES. THERE'S BEEN THREE OF THEM. YOU COULDN'T HAVE MISSED *ALL* OF THEM! WHERE YOU BEEN?

AWAY. FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

NO.

THEN YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT IMAGE COMICS, EITHER.

TOO BAD. THEY'RE THE BEST! WOW, I GUESS IT'S PRETTY TOUGH BEING A GOOD GUY, HUH?

SPAWN CAN ONLY SMILE.

WELL, I'M GOING TO BE ONE WHEN I GROW UP. BEEN PRACTICING AND EVERYTHING. EVEN GOT ME A *SYMBOL!*

Ta-DAA!

IT STANDS FOR THE *TERRORIZER!*

WHAT'S *YOURS* STAND FOR?

NOTHING.

SURE IT DOES. THEY *ALL* DO.

"IT LOOKS LIKE A BIG 'M' TO ME. SO WHAT'RE YOUR POWERS?"

"DON'T KNOW YET."

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT SUPER-POWERS YOU HAVE. THAT'S NOT VERY SMART. WELL THEN, DID SOMEBODY GIVE YOU YOUR STRENGTH?"

"YOU COULD SAY THAT."

"WHAT WAS HIS NAME?"

"MALEBOLGIA."

"THAT'S A FUNNY NAME. BUT IT DOES BEGIN WITH AN 'M'."

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, KID."

"OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS. DID THIS MALEBOLGIA GUY GIVE POWER TO ANYONE ELSE, THAT YOU KNOW OF?"

"YES."

"AND DOES *HE* HAVE THE SAME MARK?"

THE VISION RUSHES HEADLONG AT HIM. THE ***VIOLATOR'S*** *HUMAN FORM DOES HAVE A MARK. ON HIS* ***FOREHEAD.*** *A PERFECT MATCH FOR THE ONE ON SPAWN'S CHEST.*

IT REALLY IS AN "M."

TOLD YA!

BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVEN'T FIGURED? HOW DO YOU BECOME A GOOD-GUY? I MEAN A ***REAL*** ONE. NOT A PRETEND ONE.

I'D LIKE TO KNOW. SERIOUSLY.

I DON'T HAVE YOUR ANSWERS, SON. IF I DID, I WOULDN'T BE STUCK IN A BARN, NOW WOULD I?

YEAH, I GUESS NOT.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

PAT.

LISTEN, PAT. BEING A HERO ISN'T ABOUT CAPES AND COSTUMES. IT'S ABOUT ACTIONS. AND HOW YOU CHOOSE THEM.

IT'S NOT THAT EASY

IN CASE YOU HAVEN'T GUESSED, I'M THE CLASS NERD. THE TEACHER LIKES ME BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT. DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS, REALLY. THE KIDS AT SCHOOL CAN BE KINDA CRUEL AT TIMES, TOO. BUT I'M TOO SCARED TO FIGHT.

STRENGTH ISN'T ABOUT MUSCLES, PAT.

IT'S ABOUT STANDING UP FOR WHAT'S ***RIGHT***. EVEN IF OTHERS DIS-AGREE.

YOU SOUND LIKE MY DAD.

I'M NOT TRYING TO LECTURE YOU. BUT YOU KNOW THERE'S EVIL IN THE WORLD. IT COMES IN MANY FORMS. EACH OF US HAS TO STAND UP TO IT SOMETIME, IN OUR OWN WAY.

I UNDERSTAND. I THINK. CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING ELSE? DO YOU KNOW MUCH ABOUT GIRLS?

Uh?

THERE'S THIS GIRL, SEE, HER NAME IS PAM WILLIAMS. I LIKE HER LOTS. SHE'S SMART AND VERY CUTE. PROBLEM IS, SHE DOESN'T KNOW I'M ALIVE. DO YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND?

YES. I DO.

"WHAT'S HER NAME?"

"WANDA."

OKAY, THIS IS THE LAST OF IT.

THANKS FOR HOLDING CYAN WHILE I BROUGHT THE GROCERIES IN.

YOU KNOW I'D BE HOLDING HER ANYWAYS. SHE'S SUCH A SWEET GIRL. AND *BIG!* I CAN'T HARDLY KEEP UP WITH HER.

TERRY TELLS ME THAT THE CHILDRENS' WING AT THE HOSPITAL IS COMING along NICELY. THAT HUGE DONATION WAS A GODSEND.

IT WAS.

HOPEFULLY, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO THANK THE PROPER PERSON SOME DAY.

I DOUBT IT THE DONATION WAS IN *CASH*, AFTER ALL. AND NO NOTE-- *TOTALLY* ANONYMOUS.

WELL, WHOEVER IT IS MUST REALLY LOVE CHILDREN.

AND *SPEAKING* OF GOOD NEWS, HOW *ABOUT* THE WAY THINGS HAVE TAKEN CARE OF THEMSELVES, WITH THE I.R.S.!

IT'S UNBELIEVABLE. YOU *KNOW* HOW WORKED UP ABOUT IT I WAS. THEN, I GOT A 'LITTLE' GODSEND MYSELF. SOMEHOW MY TAXES ARE ALL IN ORDER *AND* THEY EVEN INCREASED MY PENSION CHECK.

LET'S BE GLAD FOR THE LITTLE THINGS.

HOW'RE YOU AND TERRY HOLDING UP WITH ALL THIS 'BOMBING' SCANDAL STUFF?

FINE. IT IS JUST SO *HARD* SOMETIMES. THEY'RE REALLY *PUSHING* HIM AT WORK. I DON'T THINK THEY TRUST HIM. HE COMES HOME SO TIRED...

SO *DISTANT*...

COUGH KGH KGH

YOU OKAY, WANDA?

MAMA. UP. PEEZ! UP.

YEAH. JUST A COUGH. I MUST BE COMING DOWN WITH SOME-THING.

PROBABLY ALL THIS STRESS.

THE GREAT BEAST RESTS FOR A MOMENT. THIS IS NOT THE RIGHT PLACE.

NOT BIG ENOUGH.

NOT TALL ENOUGH.

IT MUST BE BEHIND THE CLOUDS.

HE HAS TO GET TO THE RIGHT PLACE. THEY HAVE THE SECRET THERE.

HIS BRAIN--WHAT'S LEFT OF IT--TELLS HIM SO. BUT FIRST HE MUST FEED.

HE REMEMBERS THAT YOU MUST BE STRONG TO ENTER THE 'RIGHT PLACE'... FOR IT IS WHERE THINGS GET LOST. WHERE THINGS DISAPPEAR.

A JUNGLE. THAT'S WHAT IT IS. A MASSIVE GREY JUNGLE.

WITH SHADOWS TO HIDE MANY SECRETS.

NU YORK

SOON. VERY SOON, HE WILL FIND IT.

AND THOSE WHO MADE HIM.

JUST BEHIND THE CLOUDS.

MANHATTAN. 12th PRECINCT STATION HOUSE. 3:18 A.M.

DO YOU THINK THIS IS PROPER, SIR?

SCREW PROPER!!

KEYS THAT MIGHT UNLOCK SOME DARK *SECRETS*.

Oh, DON'T LOOK SO SURPRISED. THE WHOLE ***BUILDING*** KNOWS YOU AND BANKS ARE WARRING... AND PEOPLE *ARE* TAKING SIDES.

ME, I'M JUST OUT FOR *SELF-PRESERVATION*... WHICH MEANS I NEED A *FAVOR* FROM YOU BOYS.

WE NEED TO GET OUR HANDS ON HIS ROLODEX. YOU'VE ALREADY AGREED.

TO STAND GUARD. THAT'S ALL.

FINE.

BANKS

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED, BOYS.

YOU SEE, LIKE YOURSELVES, I'VE RECENTLY INCURRED THE CHIEF'S WRATH. MY LEASH WASN'T QUITE AS TIGHT AS HE'D'VE LIKED.

SO, I'VE JUST BEEN INFORMED THAT TODAY IS TO BE MY LAST DAY WITH THE FORCE.

I'M IN THE PROCESS OF CLEANING OUT MY OFFICE.

AND THOSE KEYS HIDE SOMETHING?

I DON'T KNOW. DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR. BUT THE FILES SIT IN A CABINET THAT ISN'T USUALLY LOCKED.

THEY'RE AFRAID *I* MIGHT TAKE ONE.

GUESS THEY DIDN'T THINK I'D MAKE DUPLICATE KEYS.

SO WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

LIKE I SAID... *SELF-PRESERVATION.* IF THEY THINK SOMEONE *ELSE* IS LOOKING WHERE THEY SHOULDN'T, THAT DISTRACTS THEM FROM *ME.*

"THE PEOPLE BANKS HANGS OUT WITH ARE HEAVY HITTERS.

"THEY DON'T MESS AROUND.

SIR. LOOK AT THIS.

"YOU GUYS CAN BUY ME SOME TIME TO DISAPPEAR."

BINGO!

RECEIPTS FROM A COURIER SERVICE-- FOR MOVING ITEMS FROM ONE POINT TO ANOTHER-- SOME UP TO FOUR OR FIVE TIMES A DAY!

ALL ENDING UP AT VARIOUS *FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.*

MY GUT TELLS ME WE DO A LITTLE POKING AROUND AND WE'VE GOT A WEB CONNECTING *POLITICIANS. A MURDERER. COPS. C.I.A.* AND *BUSINESSMEN*-- ALL INVOLVED IN SOME TWISTED PLAN.

ALL TRIGGERED BY THE DEATH OF SENATOR JENNINGS' DAUGHTER.

"*DAMN* THEM, TWITCH. KINCAID WAS JUST A *TOOL*. SOMEONE THEY COULD USE FOR *CAREER ADVANCEMENT.*

"WELL, I HOPE THEY'RE COMFORTABLE *NOW*, BECAUSE THEY'RE ABOUT TO GET *CRAPPED ON.* "

THE MOON SHINES BRIGHT IN WEST VIRGINIA, GUIDING YOUNG PAT'S FOOT-STEPS THROUGH THE DARKNESS.

LOST IN THOUGHT AS HE WALKS HOMEWARD, PAT MULLS OVER EVERYTHING SPAWN TRIED TO TELL HIM.

ABOUT LIFE. GIRLS. HEROISM. AND THE POWER FROM WITHIN.

THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME TOM AND HIS BULLIES HAVE ATTACKED POOR PAT, TRYING TO STEAL HIS COMICS AND ANY LEFTOVER POCKET CHANGE...

... BUT **TONIGHT'S** OUTCOME WILL BE THE FIRST THAT THEY COULD NOT HAVE PREDICTED.

QUIT SQUIRMING, YOU *RUNT!* WE AIN'T *THROUGH* YET!

HEY, HE'S GETTING AWAY!

YOU'RE *TOAST,* FOUR-EYES.

I DON'T THINK SO!

I'M *TIRED* OF BEING AFRAID. WELL, *NO MORE!* YOU GUYS ARE NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF STUPID *JERKS!*

HIS TRANS-FORMATION HAPPENS QUICKLY.

TOMMY! DO YOU SEE HIM?!

Oh MY *GOD! LOOK* AT HIM--HIS *EYES!*

LET'S GET *OUTTA* HERE-- *QUICK!*

YOU *CHICKENS!* CAN'T *TAKE* IT WHEN SOMEBODY'S ACTUALLY *NOT* SCARED!

SPAWN'S EMPHATIC HOMILY DIDN'T HAVE EXACTLY THE RESULTS HE WAS HOPING FOR. PAT WAS TAKING HIS NEWFOUND CONFIDENCE IN AN EXAGGERATED DIRECTION--WHICH, FOR A NINE-YEAR-OLD BOY, ISN'T ALL THAT SURPRISING.

SO WHO'S GOING TO BE *FIRST?*

HOW ABOUT... ALL OF THEM!

EACH IS EVIL, IN SOME SMALL FASHION.

JUST ENOUGH TO ATTRACT THE PARASITIC UNIFORM OF...

SPAWN!

WHAT'RE YOU *DOING*?! I THOUGHT THEY WERE AFRAID OF *ME*, NOT YOU. I DIDN'T NEED YOU TO SNEAK UP BEHIND ME!

YOU MADE ME LOOK LIKE A FOOL! ARE YOU LISTENING?

YOU'RE *HURTING* THEM! CAN'T YOU *SEE*?!

NOT REALLY. THE COSTUME HAS TAKEN OVER MOST OF HIS NEURAL SYSTEM AGAIN. SPAWN'S ACTIONS ARE NOW PREDICATED ON THE CLOAK'S EMOTIONS.

PUT 'EM DOWN! PUT 'EM DOWN!

I COULD HAVE HANDLED THEM. I DIDN'T *NEED* YOUR HELP. WHY ARE YOU *DOING* THIS?! WHY?!!

IT FOLLOWED YOU HERE ON ITS OWN. I CAN'T STOP IT!

NO MORE!! I DON'T *WANT* YOUR HELP! *NONE* OF IT! I DON'T *NEED* YOU!!

THE BOYS ARE DROPPED.

GOOD. NOW STAY!

OKAY, TOMMY, *SCRAM!* I'LL MAKE SURE IT DOESN'T COME AFTER YOU.

C'MON, *HURRY! YOU* HEARD HIM!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, SPAWN DISAPPEARS INTO THE NIGHT. WHEN THE BOYS' PARENTS TALK IT OVER, THEY'LL RATIONALIZE IT AWAY AS A TIFF BETWEEN THE YOUNGSTERS. A COUPLE OF THEM WILL BE GROUNDED.

NONE WILL BE BELIEVED.

BUT THEY KNOW.

THAT'S ALL THAT REALLY MATTERS TO THEM.

SCHOOL

EXIT

TO HIM.

THERE HE *IS*. I HOPE HE SAYS *YES*.

HELLO. HOW'RE THINGS GOING? MY NAME IS...

PAM WILLIAMS! PLEASED TO MEET YOU...!

THANKS. I HEARD ABOUT WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY... HOW YOU HELPED TOMMY AND HIS FRIENDS. *EVERY-ONE'S* TALKING ABOUT IT.

THAT WAS VERY *BRAVE* OF YOU, PAT. WE'RE ALL IMPRESSED. *I* THINK IT'S *COOL* WHAT YOU DID. SO, I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'D LIKE TO BE *MY* DATE FOR THE *SADIE HAWKINS* DANCE ON FRIDAY.

IT'D BE AN HONOR TO GO WITH THE SCHOOL *HERO*.

5:51 A.M.

ABOUT TWENTY-ONE MINUTES LATER THAN HE'D LIKE...

CRIPES!

HONK HONK

I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

COME ON! GET THE LEAD OUT, SIR!

UH-oh.

JEEZ! I PROMISED HIM I WOULDN'T BE =GRUNT= LATE AGAIN.

GOTTA THINK QUICK.

=GRUNT=

SORRY, TWITCH. I'M WORKING ON A BIG CASE. YOU KNOW HOW IT CAN BE. I HAD TO FINISH A *VERY* CRUCIAL PHONE CALL.

BY CHANCE, DID THE NUMBER BEGIN WITH A '900'?

WHA...?

DUNKIN DONUTS

OOPS!!

OKAY, OKAY. YOU GOT ME. I'M RUNNING LATE. *BUT*-- TOMORROW FOR SURE!

MOMENTS LATER...

SO, DID YOU HAVE ANY LUCK LAST NIGHT?

SOME. I CHECKED THE ROUTES OF ALL THE COURIERS WHO HAD RECEIPTS IN THE *NEW* FILE. IT'S FAIRLY OBVIOUS THE CHIEF WAS RECEIVING KICK-BACKS AND BRIBES EARLY IN HIS CAREER.

DUNKIN'

IT WAS ALL BEING LAUNDERED THROUGH AN ACCOUNT AT CHASE MANHATTAN BANK. THE CASH CAME FROM CERTAIN POLITICAL OPERATIVES INTENT ON HAVING UNOB-STRUCTED PATHS BEFORE THEM.

AND THE BEST WAY TO DO THAT IS TO HAVE MAYORS AND COMMISSION-ERS ASSIGN CERTAIN 'FRIENDS' TO KEY POSITIONS.

SUCH AS CHIEF OF POLICE.

EXACTLY.

THE PROBLEM IS, MOST OF THAT INFORMATION WAS GIVEN TO INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

AND *THEY* SWEPT IT UNDER THE CARPET.*

MEANING THAT *CITY HALL* AND THE *C.I.A.* ARE INVOLVED IN THE COVER-UP AROUND THE SENATOR'S CHILD'S MURDER.

WHICH LEAVES US WHERE, SIR?

COMPLETELY VULNERABLE.

*ISSUE 36 -- Tom

THE FINAL TWENTY MINUTES OF THEIR DRIVE IS SILENT. EACH IS PAINFULLY AWARE THEY'RE SITTING ON A TIME BOMB...

...ONE THAT'S ALREADY BEGUN TICKING.

'MORNING, JOE! SO WHAT'S THE GOOD WORD?

Um... I CAN'T LET YOU PARK IN THE COMPOUND.

WHY?

GOT SOME PAPERWORK REVOKING YOUR PARKING SPACE. I DOUBLE-CHECKED. IT'S ALL OFFICIAL. SORRY.

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN!!? GET OUT OF THE WAY, I'LL SETTLE THIS IN FIVE MINUTES. CLERICAL'S ALWAYS SCREWING UP PARKING ASSIGNMENTS.

YOU HEARD JOE. YOU'RE NOT WELCOME ANYMORE. NOW BACK THIS PIECE OF CRAP OUTTA HERE.

WHERE *CAN* THEY PARK?

WHO *CARES*? AS LONG AS IT AIN'T *HERE*.

CAPICE, BOYS?

EIGHT BLOCKS AWAY. THAT WAS THE CLOSEST SPOT THEY COULD FIND. AFTER A 25-MINUTE WALK IN FREEZING WEATHER, DETECTIVE SAM BURKE IS ABOUT TO BURST.

SOMEONE'S DEAD!

AND I DON'T MEAN *PRETTY* DEAD. I MEAN *UGLY*, **WRETCHED** DEAD.

I'M SURE THERE'S A LOGICAL EXPLANATION, SIR.

GO TO HELL, TWITCH.

AS THEY STOMP THROUGH THE PRECINCT HOUSE, BOTH DETECTIVES ARE OBLIVIOUS TO THE POINTED GLANCES OF THEIR CO-WORKERS.

THEY KNOW SOMETHING.

HEY!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? WHO ARE YOU?

AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN **MY** OFFICE?!

I... I...

I DID.

TALK FAST! WHO SAID YOU COULD DO THIS WITH *MY FILES*?

SLANDO HOXNAD

DUNKIN' DOUGH

YOU SEE, I'VE DECIDED TODAY'S YOUR *LAST* DAY, GENTLE-MEN.

REMEMBER HOW YOU BROUGHT INTERNAL AFFAIRS TO MY DOORSTEP? WELL, I *DO* BELIEVE ENOUGH TIME HAS PASSED SO THAT YOUR *FIRING* WON'T SEEM TO BE AN ACT OF *REVENGE*.

...WHICH IT *IS*.

I TOLD YOU I CAN BE A VERY *PATIENT* MAN...

...AND NOW *THIS!* YOUR HAM-FISTED TAMPERING WITH MY PHONE RECORDS! →*tsk tsk*← *VERY* SLOPPY WORK, SAMMY... EVEN FOR *YOU!*

BITE ME.

NOW IT'S TIME FOR ME TO *RETURN* THE FAVOR. INTERNAL AFFAIRS JUST GOT A *STACK* OF PAPER IMPLICATING YOU IN NUMEROUS UNAUTHORIZED INVESTIGATIONS.

I *PROMISED* YOUR TIME WOULD COME. *NOW* WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY?

BAM!

YOU'RE DEAD!

WE'RE GOING DOWN, BUT *YOU'RE* COMING *WITH US!*

HOW *DARE* *YOU!*

YOU'RE FINISHED. *WIPED OUT.* YOU *HEAR?!* NO MEDICAL. NO PENSION. *NOTHING!*

LATER...

I DON'T KNOW HOW I'M GOING TO TELL MY WIFE... AND THE CHILDREN...

DON'T WORRY =GLUMPH= CHOMP! IT'LL BE OKAY! HHORK bite CHOMP! HE AIN'T GETTING AWAY WITH =GULP= NOTHING!

YOU WANT A BITE OF THIS? SLURP IT'S GREAT!

NO THANK YOU, SIR. I'VE LOST MY APPETITE. GETTING FIRED DOES THAT TO ME.

I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN HOW ACTING LIKE A PIG HELPS YOU SETTLE YOUR NERVES.

LISTEN! DIDN'T YOU NOTICE HOW I DIDN'T GET MAD AT BANKS?!

YOU KNOW WHY? 'CAUSE WE'VE GOT THE FILE, PLUS THE NEW ONES. THAT FAT PHONY FART IS A DEAD MAN.

HE JUST DON'T KNOW IT YET.

SPT SPCH TCH

YOU SAID YOU'VE GOT A CONNECTION AT ONE OF THE PAPERS! WELL, IT'S TIME TO GO PUBLIC! AND PUT THAT PECKER IN HIS PLACE!

GET MY DRIFT? =GRUMPT= SLUPP

I SUPPOSE WE DON'T HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE... THOUGH BRINGING DOWN SO MANY PUBLIC OFFICIALS MIGHT BE A TOUGH SELL. ESPECIALLY COMING FROM TWO SEEMINGLY DISGRUNTLED WORKERS..

BUT I'LL TRY.

HOURS PASS.

AS TWILIGHT GIVES WAY TO THE INEVITABLE DARKNESS... **THEY** APPEAR.

THE NOCTURNAL CREATURES.

SOME CRAWL.

OTHERS STALK OR SLITHER. BUT ALL HEED THE SUMMONS.

THIS CALL HAS BEEN GOING OUT FOR THE PAST TWO EVENINGS.

THE INSECTS ARE THE FIRST TO ARRIVE...

...BRINGING NOURISHMENT... **STRENGTH**... TO THIS BEING CONCEIVED IN HELL.

AS ONE, THEY GIVE THEIR GIFT OF LIFE, OF ENERGY.

EACH, SLOWLY DRAINED OF ITS SWEET NECTAR... **EVIL**...

...THE ONE ATTRIBUTE THEY SHARE.

FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "GOD SHED HIS LIGHT ON EARTH IN THE NAME OF GOODNESS. AND THOSE WHO DARE SHUN IT SHALL FOREVER REMAIN STAINED IN EVIL."

THOSE WHICH LIVE BELOW THE SOIL, THOSE WHICH LIVE IN THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF LIGHT ARE PASSIVE **CONDUITS** FOR THE **EVIL** THAT ROAMS FREE -- THE **WILDING** THAT IS **STRONGER** AT **NIGHT.**

WORMS. MAGGOTS. BUGS. IN LARGE NUMBERS, THEIR AURA IS **CONSIDER-ABLE...**

...ENOUGH TO FORTIFY A LARGER EVIL HOST--

--SUCH AS VAMPIRES -- OR HELLSPAWN.

WHEN THE FORTIFICATION IS STABLE, **LARGER** BEASTS ARE NEEDED.

THEY'RE DRAWN TO THE LIVING COSTUME BY INSTINCT.

THEIR MERE **PRESENCE** ENCOURAGES A FREE FLOW OF BLACK ENERGY.

MADNESS. SIN. HATRED. IT'S BEEN GIVEN A MULTITUDE OF NAMES.

HOWEVER: **EVIL.** THAT'S WHAT IT IS, PURE AND SIMPLE. ITS BOND, UNBREAKABLE.

AS THE WOLF SKULKS CLOSER, IT PREYS AT THE SPAWN'S MIND. A RANDOM **MEMORY** IS TRIGGERED.

WANDA.

GOD, I REMEMBER. IT WAS HER **BIRTHDAY.** SHE WAS SO EXCITED TO BE GOING OUT THAT NIGHT. SPENT ALL **DAY** GETTING HERSELF READY.

SHE WAS SO BEAUTIFUL.

WHEN I CAME HOME LATE, SHE COULD SEE I HADN'T REMEMBERED. WHEN THE PHONE RANG, CALLING ME BACK TO WORK, I COULD ALMOST SEE STEAM SHOOT FROM HER EARS.

SHE TRASHED A FULL-LENGTH MIRROR AFTER I LEFT.

COULDN'T IMAGINE WHAT SHE WAS THINKING. DIDN'T WANT TO TRY.

THEN -- SHE HEARD IT.

SOMETHING IN THE HOUSE. OFF THE BEDROOM. I STILL DON'T KNOW WHY SHE DIDN'T CALL THE POLICE. LUCKY FOR ME.

WHEN SHE FINALLY OPENED THE BATHROOM DOOR, SHE SAW IT. THE PUPPY. OUR SHANNA.

I'LL NEVER FORGET HOW WANDA CRIED WHEN SHE PICKED UP THE DOG --

-- OR HOW UTTERLY SURPRISED SHE WAS AS I STEPPED OUT OF THE SHOWER, DAPPER AND READY FOR A NIGHT ON THE TOWN.

Happy Birthday

WANDA HAD OTHER PLANS, THOUGH. SHE DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE THE PUPPY SO SOON. INSTEAD, WE SHARED A SOOTHING BATH... WASHING AND CARESSING EACH OTHER.

THEN, WE MADE LOVE UNTIL WE FELL ASLEEP IN EACH OTHERS' ARMS.

SHANNA JOINED US.

MY PAST NEGLIGENCE ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS HAD WORKED TO MY ADVANTAGE. THE CALL FROM WORK WAS A SET-UP... AS WAS MY FEIGNED IGNORANCE. BUT BOTH BOUGHT ME ENOUGH TIME TO SNEAK IN THE BACK DOOR, AFTER HURRIDLY GETTING DRESSED AT THE NEIGHBOR'S. THEN, STRATEGICALLY, I PLANTED THE PUP AND HID MYSELF.

IT WAS PERFECT. SHE WAS PERFECT.

GOD, I MISS HER.

... IT'D BE NEAR *IMPOSSIBLE* FOR ME TO GET THIS INTO PRINT THAT QUICKLY. EVEN IF IT'S ALL TRUE, THE *TIME* IT'D TAKE TO CORROB-ORATE ALL THAT YOU'RE TELLING ME--!

I UNDER-STAND, MR. TAYLOR-- WHICH IS WHY I BROUGHT *THIS*.

A FILE?

YES. THE LEADING EDGE OF A PAPER TRAIL SO THICK A BLIND MAN COULD TRIP OVER IT... AS LONG AS HE'S POINTED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

KINCAID, WIL
REF: (Senator) JENNING
(Police Chief) BA
(C.I.A Dir.) WY

INSIDE, YOU'LL FIND DOCUMENTED *FACTS*. IT'LL SAVE YOU *WEEKS*. THEY'RE ALL HERE: CHIEF BANKS, HIS BOYS, AND A FEW 'SPECIAL' FRIENDS.

LISTEN, TWITCH. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN STRAIGHT WITH ME, BUT THIS IS *TOO* BIG. EVEN IF I CAN GET MY EDITOR TO COME ON BOARD WITH THIS, WHICH IS A *BIG* IF, GOING AFTER THE C.I.A. IS SUICIDE. I'VE *SEEN* IT.

KINCAID, WILLIAM

LOOK, TAYLOR. YOU WANT TO KEEP WRITING ABOUT MUGGINGS AND STORE OPENINGS, *FINE*. BUT *THIS STORY IS TRUE!!* AND IT'LL MAKE SOMEONE'S CAREER.

LET'S GET *OUT* OF HERE, TWITCH. I'M SURE THERE'S SOMEONE HUNGRY AT THE NEW YORK *POST*.

PLEASE, MR. TAYLOR. I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO DO ANYTHING YOU'RE NOT CAPABLE OF.

WELL, I'VE BEEN AFRAID A FEW TIMES IN MY LIFE, TOO.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

Uh... *OKAY!* I'LL DO MY BEST.

THAT'S ALL I ASK.

PRETTY *SLICK*, TWITCH. GUILT GETS 'EM EVERY TIME.

EVIL IS ASCENDANT.

THE DAY IS LONG OVER.

AND SO THEY COME. HELL'S CHILDREN, READY TO GIVE.

AWAITING ITS SIGNAL...

THEN, THEY HEAR IT:

THE HEART OF DARKNESS BEATING ANEW.

HE'S BEEN IN HIS EDITOR'S OFFICE FOR OVER AN HOUR, SHOOTING DOWN EVERY QUESTION THE PAPER'S ATTORNEYS COULD POSSIBLY ASK.

DAILY TRIBUNE

THE TRUTH, OR AT LEAST ITS APPROXIMATION, MUST NOT BE COMPROMISED.

THIS IS *GREAT* WORK, TAYLOR! WITH OUR CIRCULATION IN THE TOILET, THIS COULD BE OUR MOTHER-LODE. NOW YOU'RE *SURE* YOU HAVEN'T MISSED ANYTHING?

NOT A THING.

GOOD. THEN LEAVE IT WITH ME. I'LL MAKE A FEW CALLS MYSELF, JUST TO MAKE SURE OF A COUPLE OF THINGS.

BUT, MR. SALICRUP, I *ASSURE* YOU THAT--

EDITOR CHIEF

LOOK, TAYLOR. IF I'M GOING TO STICK MY NECK OUT A MILE, I'D LIKE TO REST EASY IT WON'T GET CHOPPED OFF. WE'RE MESSING WITH AN 'OLD BOY NETWORK' HERE.

SOMETHING QUITE SIMPLE. *COLLAPSE* ALL SUPPORT AROUND BANKS *IMMEDIATELY*. WHATEVER 'LOOP' EXISTS, MAKE IT DISAPPEAR. *NO ONE* MUST ACKNOWLEDGE HIM.

USE THE CODEWORD "MELTDOWN." I WANT EVERY TRAIL TO *DOUBLE BACK* ON OUR DEAR CHIEF BANKS.

THEN, HAVE THE APPROPRIATE PEOPLE MODIFY THE TRIBUNE'S STORY.

A CALL IS MADE. THAT LEAK THEN TRICKLES PAST EIGHT PEOPLE IN FOUR UNCONNECTED GOVERNMENT OFFICES UNTIL FINALLY POOLING AT THE FOOT OF ITS ORCHESTRATOR...

...MR. WYNN, WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO?

TWO MORE DAYS PASS.

MY GUY SAID THE STORY HITS TOMORROW. GUARANTEED.

401

BANKS

CHIEF OF POLICE

WHERE'D THEY GET IT FROM.

THE REPORTER'S KEEPING HIS SOURCE CONFIDENTIAL. WE'RE STILL WORKING ON IT.

BUT WHAT THIS *MEANS* IS THAT YOU'VE BEEN MADE THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB.

EVERYONE YOU WANTED ME TO CALL IS CONVENIENTLY OUT OF THEIR OFFICES.

YOUR NETWORK OF POLITICAL 'FRIENDS' IS BEING SHIELDED.

THE BRIBES. THE MURDER. THE WHOLE *SCHEME* IS LANDING IN *YOUR LAP.*

THEY CAN'T DO THIS TO ME. I'VE SERVED THEM TOO WELL.

NEVER MIND. I'LL MAKE THIS GO AWAY.

NO. HE WON'T.

THAT REALITY IS BEGINNING TO *SINK IN.*

I DON'T *CARE* IF HE'S ON VACATION! *SOMEBODY* HAS TO KNOW WHERE HE IS.

THE SAME SCENE PLAYS OUT REPEATEDLY THAT NIGHT.

THEN, THE NEXT MORNING...

DAILY TRIBUNE

KID KILLER LINKED TO POLICE CHIEF

SENATOR'S DAUGHTER'S DEATH UNDER NEW SCRUTINY

BABY. KILLER. THIEF.

BABY KILLER. THIEF.

THE LABELS SWALLOW HIM. THOUGH NO ONE HAS REPEATED THEM TO HIS FACE, HE KNOWS HOW THEY THINK.

EVERYONE WITHIN THE PRECINCT IS THE SAME... HIDING BEHIND HUSHED VOICES OR CLOSED DOORS.

HE SHOULDN'T HAVE TRUSTED ANYONE.

CHIEF, IT'S YOUR WIFE AGAIN. SHE'S CRYING. ***PLEASE***. SHE WANTS TO TALK TO YOU FOR ***JUST A MINUTE***.

LEAVE ME ALONE. ALL OF YOU.

AL GILLEY. BOB COMONACO. HE COULD COUNT ON THEM. ALWAYS. THEY'D **NEVER** TURN THEIR BACKS ON HIM.

BUT OTHERS KNEW THAT, TOO.

SO CHIEF BANKS IS ALMOST **NUMB** WHEN AN ANONYMOUS PHONE CALLER INFORMS HIM THAT BOTH AL AND BOB WERE **LOST AT SEA** YESTERDAY IN A **TRAGIC** BOATING ACCIDENT.

THE CARIBBEAN **COAST GUARD** ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR ANY SIGNS OF LIFE.

BANKS KNOWS THEY'RE WASTING THEIR TIME.

...THE SITUATION DEFIES EASY ANALYSIS. WHAT'S CLEAR IS THAT ***LOUIS BANKS,*** POLICE CHIEF OF NEW YORK CITY'S 12TH PRECINCT, HAS BEEN TIED TO EVENTS WHICH LED SEVERAL YEARS AGO TO THE DEATH OF 8-YEAR-OLD AMANDA JENNINGS, DAUGHTER OF D.C. APPROPRIATIONS SENATOR PAUL JENNINGS. BANKS' NAME WAS CONNECTED WITH THE AFFAIR WHEN A SUSPECT, ***WILLIAM KINCAID,*** WAS FOUND DEAD IN BANKS' OFFICE, AN UNSOLVED CRIME FOR WHICH BANKS WAS NOT ACCUSED.

BANKS, WHOSE PRECINCT INCLUDES THE BOWERY, HELD A NUMBER OF JOBS BEFORE BEING APPOINTED POLICE CHIEF, FROM SHERIFF IN A SMALL COUNTY IN DELAWARE TO HEAD OF A PRIVATE SECURITY FIRM IN WASHINGTON, D.C. HIS CONNECTION WITH JENNINGS DATES FROM THAT TIME, WHEN HIS FIRM WAS DISMISSED FOR JOB PERFORMANCE IRREGULARITIES. SKETCHY DETAILS SUGGEST HE THEN HELD AN INTELLIGENCE POSITION IN THE NATION'S CAPITOL BEFORE THE UNEXPLAINED MOVE UP TO THE CHIEF'S JOB.

THIS FLAP OVER A CRIMINAL COVERUP IN THE BOWERY IS JUST THE MOST RECENT INDICATION THAT OFFICIAL CORRUPTION IN THIS CITY IS OUT OF CONTROL. A PERSON CAN'T HELP BUT BE NOSTALGIC FOR THE TIME WHEN SCANDALS WERE BREAKING OUT ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE OR GRAMMERCY PARK. ***THOSE*** REGIONS KNEW HOW IT WAS DONE, WITH SUBTLETY, STYLE, AND A WINK. IF THE FORCES OF JUSTICE WERE ACCOUNTABLE, ***THESE*** AFFAIRS WOULD BE GIVEN THE PUBLIC AIRING THEY DESEVE, RATHER THAN BEING HUSHED UP BY THE NEW MONEY IN TOWN. INSTEAD, WE'RE LEFT WITH MISERABLE CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN FROM THE POOREST QUARTERS OF TOWN.

THE ONLY INTERESTING THING ABOUT THE WHOLE AFFAIR IS THE TRAGEDY OF CHIEF BANKS, A MAN WHO'S MOVED FROM JOB TO WELL-UNIFORMED JOB, ONLY TO END UP SCRAPING BOTTOM WEARING SUITS OFF THE RACK FROM WOOLWORTH'S.

US PO' FOLK ABOUT A POLICE CHIEF WHO ***MIGHT*** HAVE ABETTED A ***CHILD MURDERER?*** A ***MASS*** CHILD MURDERER?!? I LOVE THIS TOWN!

LET'S SEE HOW THE FACTS LINE UP. CHIEF BANKS, FORMERLY SHERIFF BANKS, FORMERLY RENT-A-COP BANKS, FORMERLY R.O.T.C SECOND-LIEUTENANT BANKS, COMES OUT OF ***NOWHERE*** AND IS APPOINTED FOR NO APPARENT REASON TO THE MOST OBSCURE PRECINCT IN MANHATTAN. NOW WE'RE TOLD THERE'S A DIRECT LINK BETWEEN HIM, THE ***DEAD CHILD*** OF A ***SENATOR,*** AND ***KIDDIE KILLER KINCAID.*** AND WAIT--HE ALSO HELD A JOB IN ***INTELLIGENCE?*** HEY, ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE HE WAS DEMOTED FROM THE C.I.A. TO RIDING HERD ON ***DRUNKS,*** AND THEN TOOK HIS FRUSTRATIONS OUT ON THE SENATOR'S KID WHEN THE AGENCY HAD THEIR ***BUDGET*** SLASHED? OF COURSE, THIS SUGGESTS THE SPOOKS ARE CONTROLLING THE COPS... NAH. ***THAT*** WOULD BE ***ILLEGAL.***

THE MAYOR.

POLICE COMMISSIONER.

GOVERNOR.

HE WON'T RETURN ANY OF THEIR CALLS.

ISOLATION. IT PLAYS WITH THE MIND.

LOOK AT THEM. BUNCH OF *PARASITES*. LOOKING FOR SOME *FREAK SHOW*.

AS DO OTHERS.

YOU HAVE THE SUBPEONA WITH YOU?

YES.

THEN LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.

... AS FEDERAL INVESTIGATORS ENTERED THE BUILDING, ONE COMMENTED THAT NO OFFICIAL CHARGES HAD BEEN LAID. THEY PLAN ON QUESTIONING CHIEF LOUIS BANKS ABOUT...

CBS

I HOPE THEY *FRY* THE BUGGER, TWITCH.

SO DO I, SIR. BUT OUR FILE *SHOULD* HAVE EXPOSED SOME OTHERS, *TOO*. SOMETHING WENT WRONG.

HEY, *FEDS!* WHY DON'T YOU TRY CATCHING SOME *CROOKS*, INSTEAD OF HASSLING ONE OF *US*?!

THE MEDIA. THEIR ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES HAVE BEEN DEBATED ENDLESSLY. BUT, ULTIMATELY, THEY STILL HAVE A JOB TO DO.

THIS IS IT, THEN?

AMMO

DAMN YOU, WYNN...

BANKS

WHAT'S UP?

IT'S LOCKED.

OPEN UP, BANKS! YOU'VE GOT NOWHERE TO GO!

YES, HE DOES.

BLAM

ANOTHER BLACK ROSE BLOOMS IN HELL TONIGHT.

"NOT RIGHT. IT'S *NOT* NATURAL. WE ALL KNOW IT.

"I'M JUST NOT AFRAID TO VOICE IT.

"SO YOU CAN ALL *ROT* HERE WHILE YOU AWAIT YOUR SELECTION, BUT I'M *TIRED* OF BEING WASTED HERE IN SECOND FLIGHT.

"IT'S *TIME.*

"THEY CAN THINK I'M QUESTIONING THE *POWER PROTOCOL* IF THEY WANT. BUT THIS IS ABOUT *NATURE.* KEEPING THINGS *PURE.*

"ANGELA'S FORGOTTEN THAT. SHE'S LOST HER FOCUS. THE SUPPOSED 'BEST OF THE BEST.' PRIORITY FLIGHT A-1. WELL, NOT THE WAY *I* SEE IT.

"SHE'S FORFEITED HER POSITION BY COMITTING HER SIN.

"HEAVEN *DOES NOT* TOLERATE HELL. EVIL *MUST* BE VANQUISHED.

"BUT NOW ANGELA WEARS HER TREASON LIKE A BADGE OF HONOR. WHY ELSE WOULD SHE HAVE GIVEN THE HELLSPAWN A CHANCE TO ESCAPE?* SHE, MORE THAN ANY-ONE, KNOWS THE SACRED RULE.

"STILL, SHE CONSORTED WITH HIM. SHARED FLUIDS. IT WAS A CHOICE BEYOND IMAGINING.

"WHY WON'T THEY SEE THAT? WHILE I WAIT HERE AT *'THE GATE'*, SHE'S MOCKING THE LAWS."

*ANGELA MINI-SERIES--TOM.

OH, DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK. I KNOW THIS WILL BE NON-SANCTIONED, BUT THE NEED IS CLEAR CUT AND YOU ALL KNOW IT. THIS IS ONE OF MALEBOLGIA'S *SOUL SUCKERS* WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

THAT'S ALL THE SANCTION I NEED.

THERE'VE NEVER BEEN SCORES HIGHER THAN MINE IN ANY OF THE FLIGHT LEVELS. I PEGGED THE METER IN ALL CATEGORIES. NO ONE ELSE WAS EVEN *CLOSE.*

I SHATTERED *ALL* OF ANGELA'S OLD RECORDS. I'M READY TO TAKE HER PLACE AS *PRIORITY A-1.*

I JUST HAVE TO TAKE OUT THIS SPAWN. QUICKLY AND WITHOUT MERCY. THEN THE FLIGHT SUPERVISORS WILL SEE I'VE PROVEN MYSELF. THAT *I* SHOULD BE THE ONE.

AND IF YOU'RE THINKING IT'S TOO LATE, *FORGET* IT. THAT "ZEAL" INDICTMENT FROM PRE-FLIGHT TRAINING NEVER WENT ON MY PERMANENT RECORD. I *RETAINED* MY "SHIMMER."

I'M CLEAN. OFFICIALLY.

DUSK.

THE TRIUMPH OF DARKNESS OVER THE RETREATING LIGHT. THE PASSING OF LIGHT'S INFLUENCE OVER THE LAND. WHEN THE BALANCE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL BEGINS ITS SHIFT.

SOON SHADOWS WILL POPULATE THE GROUNDS, MULTIPLYING WITH EACH HEARTBEAT. DARKNESS WILL ONCE AGAIN TRIUMPH OVER THE WEAKENING LIGHT, RELEASING THE SERVANTS OF NIGHT.

AND SO THEY COME.

SEDUCED BY THE TWILIGHT'S DANCE. FOR THE RITUAL NECESSITATES THOSE THAT CARRY THE NOURISHMENT OF HELL.

THUS DOES THE DARKNESS REPLENISH ITSELF.. RECONCILING THE LIVING DEAD IN SOME BLASPHEMOUS PARODY OF PHOTOSYNTHESIS...

TRANSFORMING THE UNSETTLING INTO SOMETHING UNHOLY.

ITS DANCE IS ONE THE PARASITIC SHROUD KNOWS WELL.

HOW EXHILARATING, THE SOUNDS OF THEIR EAGER APPROACH.

SATAN'S CHILDREN SPRING FORTH.

[illegible] THE [illegible] OF THE [illegible] MENT.

...PARK.

...SELF ITSELF ...ING FORTH.

THEY MUST CONSERVE THE HOST BODY.

A RIB-STICKING MEAL THAT WILL AGAIN ENMESH THE PROTECTIVE LAYER WITH ITS VESSEL.

SHELTER IT. QUENCH ITS VILE THIRST BY STRENGTHENING THE SYMBIOTE.

WORMS. MAGGOTS. THE DREGS OF A DARK EARTH WHERE BONES AND BLOOD OF THE DEAD ENRICH THE HUMUS.

THE DANK JUICES SLAKE THIS MACABRE THIRST, MOISTENING CRUSTY LAYERS DAMAGED BY THEIR RECENT RADICAL DISMEMBERMENT.

AND SO IT FEEDS, IN A DEMANDING RITUAL OF SLATHERING HELL-BLOOD SPILT CARESSINGLY UPON THIS UNIFORM OF DARKNESS...

...GASPING IN THE RUSH OF ITS HELLISH STIMULATION.

THE BODY CLIMAXES, THE ORGASMIC WRENCHING SHOOTING AGONY THROUGH ITS VIOLATED, SWADDLED TISSUES.

HE RECEIVES A CASCADE OF FLASHING MOMENTS.

CRIMES AGAINST THE HOT VESSEL ARE FLUSHED FROM MEMORY'S VOID... IMAGES OF A ROTTING BODY, WHERE ONCE DWELLED A HEART...

THE EXPERIMENT. THE EXTRACTION. THE PAIN.

ALL SPUN TOGETHER BY THE CURSE

...IN A BIZARRE ATTEMPT TO RETRIEVE HIDDEN SECRETS THAT MIGHT ENDOW HIM WITH CONTROL OVER [redacted].*

HE PAID DEARLY FOR HIS VENTURE.

*ISSUE 40 TOM

FOR THE SECRETS ARE ETERNAL

THEIR MEANING IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GRASP.

WE REACH FOR LUCID THOUGHTS. THOSE THAT WILL CALM US AND BRING COMFORT.

WANDA.

SIR, IT'S, uh...SOMEWHAT DARK.

YEAH. LEMME GET THE LIGHT HERE.

CLICK

THANK YOU, SIR.

YEAH, SURE. *Hmmm.* NOW WHERE DID I... *Aww!* THERE IT IS!

I'VE GOT SOME COLD LEFTOVER PIZZA, TWITCH. LOTS OF ***EXTRA*** TOPPINGS. CARE FOR A SLICE?

Umm...

NO THANKS, SIR. I'M... NOT MUCH FOR "EXTRA" TOPPINGS.

SUIT YOURSELF.

I SEE YOU'VE ADDED A FEW NEW TOUCHES TO THE PLACE.

CHOMP!

YEAH. GLAD YA NOTICED. I'VE HAD SOME SPARE TIME SINCE BANKS FIRED US.

MAY HE ROT IN HELL.

STILL HAVEN'T TOLD YOUR WIFE YET, unh?

I CAN'T NOT YET. IT'D BREAK HER HEART. WHICH MAKES ALL THIS EVEN HARDER TO TAKE.

BANKS SHOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN THE FALL HIMSELF. THAT FILE SPAWN GAVE YOU INDICTED A'SLEW OF OTHERS.

CHOMP! CHOMP! HORK!

THERE'S YOUR ANSWER.

HE'S THE ONLY PLAYER LEFT THAT SEEMS TO BE OUTCAST FROM THE OTHERS

IT DOES SEEM TO BE OUR MOST LIKELY TARGET FOR NOW. ESPECIALLY SINCE WE WON'T HAVE POLICE CLEARANCE ANY-WHERE ELSE.

IF WE GET SOME QUICK ANSWERS FROM HIM, THIS CASE WILL BUST WIDE OPEN.

C'MON, SIR, FINISH YOUR PIZZA. WE'VE WORK TO DO.

HE REACHES IN DESPERATION FOR THOUGHTS TO SOOTHE HIS INNER AND OUTER ANGUISH.

BUT, AS IF REACTING TO HIS ERODED STATE THEY SCATTER

CARRIED AWAY ON THE WINGS OF NIGHT.

HIS SACRIFICE WAS FOR LOVE. NOW THAT NOBILITY HAS BEEN TAKEN

TWISTED.

MUTATED INTO A SICKENING JOKE OF CRUELTY AND PAIN. SEPARATING HIM EVEN FURTHER FROM THE ONE HE CAME BACK FOR

WANDA.

PLIP

REALITY...AND IT'S TOO BIZARRE TO BE ANYTHING BUT...

...REALITY THEN REARS ITS FUZZY HEAD.

6.8.0.1

IT DOES LAST LONG.

CAUGHT AGAIN IN THE MIDDLE OF SOME HELLISH FEEDING RITUAL, AL SIMMONS CAN FEEL A KINETIC FLOW FROM CREATURE TO COSTUME.

A WAY FOR EACH HELL-SPAWN TO MAINTAIN ITS K-READINGS...

BLACK ENERGY TRANSFERRAL IS WHAT THE SPAWN HUNTING MANUAL LABELS IT.

A METHOD TO JUMP-START ITSELF WITH ITS ENVIRONMENT'S EVIL.

BUT THE LINK SHATTERS. THE GREAT BEAR SENSES A PRESENCE IN THE SHADOWS.

IT MOVES TOWARD THE INTRUDER.

YOU'LL DRAIN NO MORE STRENGTH FROM THIS BEAST, *PARASITE!*

BLOOD!

YOUR SYMBIOTE'S LEVELS ARE OBVIOUSLY EBBING. THAT'S GOOD. PERFECT! THE HEAVENS ARE SMILING ON ME TO FIND YOU IN *RECHARGE*. THIS SHOULDN'T TAKE LONG.

YOU SEE, HELL-SCUM, YOUR TOUCH HAS CONTAMINATED WHAT WAS ONCE PURE, SPOILING ONE WHO WAS DEVOTED TO GOOD. NOW SHE'S TAINTED. LIKE YOU. YOU'RE BOTH GOING TO BURN NOW. YOU AND YOUR *ONCE* HEAVENLY CONCUBINE... **ANGELA!**

ANGELA?

YOU I UNDERSTAND. WHY YOU SOIL THE GOODNESS YOU TOUCH. YOUR MASTER LORDS OVER ALL HE CREATES. BUT ANGELA...

SHE HAS NO EXCUSE.

SHE KNOWS BETTER!

CHAAK!

SHE IS NO LONGER ONE OF THE PURE. NOW SHE'S A *HELLCAST!*

THE NEXT STEP TO *HELLSPAWN.*

THAT'S IT, *FIGHT!!*

I'VE WAITED TOO LONG TO HAVE YOU COWER *NOW,* DEMON!

SO GET UP!

YOU, COSTUME--USE YOUR HOST'S INTELLIGENCE. HIS WAR INSTINCTS.

IF I'M TO DEFY MY SUPERIORS, IT MUST BE FOR AN EXTREME CAUSE.

THAT'S YOU.

YOUR DEATH WILL GET ME INSIDE THE HOLY WALLS.

SPLASH

SO YOU'RE SOME KIND OF ANGEL, IS THAT IT? LIKE ANGELA. WANTING A TROPHY FOR YOUR SHOWCASE.

WELL, SCREW YOU.

KEEP PUSHING. PLEASE. I'VE SEEN THE DAMAGE MY ARMOR CAN INFLICT WHEN IT WANTS.

YOU JUST HAVE TO TRIGGER IT.

BRAVE TALK, OR MAYBE JUST A BLUFF? YOU'RE WEAK. WE BOTH KNOW THAT. YOUR SYMBIOTE'S NOT PREPARED.

I WONDER IF THIS IS HOW ANGELA CONQUERED SO MANY.

USING WEAK-KILLS TO PAD HER REPUTATION. I *KNEW* HER VICTORIES WERE OVERSTATED.

THE WEAK SLAYING THE WEAK.

NO WONDER YOU 'FOUND' EACH OTHER.

--WHOSE TRANSGRESSIONS *SCREAM* FOR UNHOLY PUNISHMENT.

YOU'RE BOTH *ABOMINATIONS*--

HEAAAHHHHEE-HEE-HA

I JUST LOVE SOME ANGRY LITTLE VIXEN BEATIN' SIMMONS LIKE A MAGGOT-HEADED STEP CHILD.

HE'S TOO STUPID TO EVEN KNOW HOW SCREWED HE IS...

HEHHHEEE-HA-HARRRHHRT

NEW YORK

Heh-heh! ...WITH HEAVEN SQUEEZING HIM ON ONE END AND HELL ON THE OTHER. VERY SOON, DEAR SPAWNIE, YOU'RE GONNA POP LIKE A PUS-FILLED CANKERING BOIL.

HARRHHH! THIS IS *FAR* TOO GOOD!

BLAAAHAHHH

IT'S GOTTA BE MY FRIGGIN' BIRTHDAY!

FLQUISH

FLAQUASHH

YEARRGH!

THIS IS BETTER THAN EATING BARBEQUED CRIPPLES ON A CRUTCH!

VOOPGHH... Errr...

BUURPP!

OOH... THAT HIT THE BLACK SPOT. AND THE BEST PART ABOUT IT? OUR PAL AL HASN'T BEGUN TO FEEL THE CRAP I'M ABOUT TO HEAP ON HIM.

MATTER OF FACT, THEY'RE ALL A BUNCH OF BONEHEADS.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, GUYS?

♪ I'VE GOT WANDA, TERRY, GRANNIE ALL BY THE CHINNY- ♪ ♫ WYNN-WYNN! ♫

JASON WYNN, MY BOY, YOU'RE DOING ME PROUD.

TIME TO CELEBRATE. I DESERVE A TREAT.

NOW WHERE CAN I FIND ME SOME PUPPIES TO KICK...?

IS IT SECONDS?

MINUTES?

HOURS?

REALITY HAS BLURRED.

AND THEN... AS HE REGAINS SOME FOCUS...

IT'S OVER, HELLSPAWN.

I'M SENDING YOU BACK TO YOUR DARK MASTER.

BUT PART OF YOU STAYS HERE.

YOUR HEAD.

DECAPITATION.

THE ONLY WAY TO PERMANENTLY KILL AN UNDEAD.

I'LL MAKE SURE ANGELA HOLDS IT BEFORE **SHE** DIES!

ISSUE 45

DECAPITATION

THE ONLY WAY TO END THE BATTLE, TO ACHIEVE TRUE VICTORY OVER THE ACCURSED HELLSPAWN.

THOSE WHO'VE BEEN TUTORED TO HUNT HELL'S OFFICERS-IN-TRAINING KNOW THIS — AND KNOW AS WELL THAT, LACKING HEAVEN'S REGULATION WEAPON, THIS IS THE RECOMMENDED METHOD.

ONCE THE HELLSPAWN HAS BEEN SUFFICIENTLY WEAKENED OR DISORIENTED, A FINAL BLOW — CLEAN AND SWIFT — VOIDS THE CREATURE AND ITS LIVING SHELL FROM THIS LEVEL OF EXISTENCE.

ITS SEVERED HEAD IS PROOF OF THAT FINALITY.

THEN AND ONLY THEN WILL THE UNDEAD FINALLY DIE.

FOR THE VICTOR, IT MEANS AN IMMEDIATE PROMOTION INTO FLIGHT LEVEL ONE.

THIS SHOULD BE THE RIGHTEOUS GOAL OF **EVERY** ANGEL.

EVEN FOR **THIS** PRIZE, THOUGH, **FEW** ANGELS HAVE VENTURED INTO BATTLE AGAINST THE HELLSPAWN. IT'S VIRTUALLY A **SUICIDAL** ACT, WITH NO DOCUMENTED SUCCESS BY ANY STUDENT.

IF EVER THAT DAY COMES TO PASS, A NEW **STAR** WILL SHINE IN GOD'S RANKS.

HER PRAISES SUNG FOR ALL ETERNITY.

HOLY MASTER, YOU'VE ANSWERED MY PRAYERS--- GIVEN ME STRENGTH TO...

FOR **SHE** WILL NOT HAVE BEEN FOOLED BY THE SPAWN'S TRICKERY.

THE *HEAD*--- IT'S...?!

IT'S NOT *REAL!* THE DAMNED THING'S USING ITS *MAGIC!*

NOT QUITE...

THE CREATURE'S CLOAK HAD BRIEFLY OBSCURED ITS **HEAD**... LONG ENOUGH FOR A MOUND OF HIDDEN **WORMS** TO SLITHER FROM THE HUNDREDS OF FOLDS TWISTING THROUGHOUT THE BLOOD-RED CAPE...

...TAKING **SHAPE** RIGHT NEXT TO THE HELLSPAWN'S EXPOSED **THROAT.**

SHE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UNAWARES HAD THIS YOUNG ANGEL NOTICED THAT HER FALLEN PREY HAD BEEN WEARING A **MASK** BUT MOMENTS EARLIER.

TOOK THE BAIT, DID YOU?

GOOD.

I DON'T KNOW WHY ANY OF THIS IS HAPPENING, BUT YOU TELL HEAVEN I'M NOT **READY** TO DIE!

HOW DARE THEY SEND A CHILD TO DO THEIR KILLING?!

AL SIMMONS PLAYS THE GAME.

HELL'S SYMBIOTIC UNIFORM IS ASSISTING HIS BROKEN BODY'S EVERY MOVE. AL KNOWS THERE MUST BE NO SIGN OF **WEAKNESS**.

THE PACKAGE **MUST** APPEAR WHOLE: SYMBIONT AND LIVERY WORKING AS **ONE**.

ANGELA. THAT TRAITOROUS **WHORE**. I'LL NOT LET **EITHER** OF YOU MOCK OUR CAUSE.

ANGELA WAS TOO **GOOD** FOR YOUR GOD.

NOT **EVER!**

A MOMENT. SHE'D TAKEN HER EYE OFF HIM FOR ONLY A **MOMENT.**

WHAT...?

NOW, THE NIGHT WIND **HOWLS,** RESONATING IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THE ROGUE ANGEL PREPARES FOR ANYTHING.

OR EVERY-THING.

SHOW YOUR SELF DEMON!

IT DOES.

UNDERGROUND, WHERE **MADNESS** REIGNS.

FROM THE ONE DIRECTION SHE HADN'T PREPARED FOR.

SHE'D BEEN TAUGHT THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF SUNLIGHT DWELLS **EVIL,** AND THAT THE GREATEST EVIL LIVES **BELOW... UNDER-GROUND,** IN ETERNAL **BLACKNESS.**

WHERE GOD'S GRACE IS **FORBIDDEN.**

FOREVER.

ALREADY SPARKED BY THE NIGHT'S VISITORS, THE HELLSPAWN HAS NOW ABSORBED LATENT EVIL FLOWING IN THE SOIL.

ALL THIS RICH NOURISH-MENT HAS LEFT IT SWEPT UP IN A HELLISH HIGH!

... AND MAKING IT CARELESS.

THE ANGEL-WARRIOR SEIZES THE OPENING--

-- PRAYING SHE CAN GAIN THE ADVANTAGE--

--AND SOMEHOW END THIS UNHOLY BATTLE.

...FUNERAL OF LOUIS BANKS, CHIEF OF NEW YORK CITY'S 12TH PRECINCT. A LONE MOTORCYCLE ESCORT WAS THE TOKEN HONOR GUARD FOR THIS CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE.

HIS FREQUENT CAREER SHIFTS--PRIVATE SECURITY OPERATOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVE, POLICE COMMANDER--SHOW A MAN OF RARE AMBITION. INFORMATION LEAKED JUST BEFORE HIS SUICIDE, HOWEVER, RAISED ALLEGATIONS OF LONG-STANDING TIES TO ORGANIZED CRIME.

SEVERAL DRAMATIC EVENTS HAVE BEEN TIED TO BANKS. AN ATTACK MONTHS AGO ON THE C.I.A.'S NEW YORK OFFICES IS SEEN AS A REVENGE ATTACK ON HIS FORMER EMPLOYERS. THE BOMBING MINUTES LATER OF A NEIGHBORING SECURITIES BROKERAGE WAS THEN INTENDED TO ASSIST HIS AGENTS IN THEIR ESCAPE. THE CHILD-KILLING SPREE OF WILLIAM KINCAID HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS PART OF AN EXTORTION SCHEME.

THE N.Y.P.D.'S OFFICE OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS HAS LAUNCHED AN INVESTIGATION, QUIETING FOR NOW THE POINTED QUESTIONS RAISED BY SOME MEDIA OUTLETS.

NOTHING SAYS 'NEW YORK' MORE THAN A POIGNANT DISPLAY. OF ***COURSE*** I'M TALKING ABOUT FUNERALS. THE BOYS IN BLUE BURIED THEIR DARKEST KNIGHT YESTERDAY, IN THE FORM OF THE BOWERY'S CHIEF LOUIS BANKS.

IN CLEVER COUNTERPOINT TO HIS SHORTCOMINGS WITH PROCESSES OF ***JUSTICE***, BANKS' SEND-OFF WAS THE ***MODEL*** OF RESTRAINT. THE PROCESSION WAS LED BY A SOLITARY OFFICER ON A MOTORCYCLE... A SIGHT MORE HEART-RENDING THAN TWO COPS IN A SQUAD CAR COULD ***POSSIBLY*** HAVE BEEN, AND PROBABLY EASIER TO ASSIGN. BRINGING UP THE REAR WAS THE HEARSE ITSELF, CARRYING ONLY THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR, THE LATE CHIEF, AND HIS WIDOW. WHAT ***TASTE!***

MY SOURCES TELL ME THE DECEASED WORE BLACK.

HERE'S ONE FOR THE BOOKS. IN THE CATEGORY *"DECEASED WILD MEN WHO DIDN'T KNOW HOW OR WHEN TO STOP,"* COULD **ANY** NOMINEE BE MORE OF A SHOO-IN THAN OUR OWN ***CHIEF BANKS?*** NOT ***ONLY*** WAS HE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER A MEMBER OF EVERY SECURITY OR POLICING SERVICE KNOWN TO ***MAN*** BUT, IF ALL OF OFFICIALDOM IS TO BE BELIEVED, HE WAS *AT THE SAME TIME* MASTERMINDING CRIMINAL AND TRAITOROUS ACTS AFFECTING EVERYONE SOUTH OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY! CHIEF BANKS: *YOU THE MAN!*

MY CONFIDENCE IN HIS NOMINATION IS BACKED UP BY THE UNANIMITY OF THE *FINGER-POINTING*. THE WORD ON THE STREET AND IN THE EXECUTIVE OFFICES IS THAT OUR MAN BANKS *SINGLE-HANDEDLY* RAISED THE ***MONEY***, PROCURED THE *ORDINANCE*, RECRUITED ***AND*** TRAINED HIS OWN *PRIVATE ARMY*, AND CARRIED OUT *SEVERAL* SUCCESSFUL OPERATIONS WHILE IN THE EMPLOY OF NEW YORK'S FINEST. OF *COURSE* HE DID CHILDREN. WHEN WOULD HE HAVE FOUND THE TIME TO RAISE KIDS ***AND*** AN ARMY?

C'MON, TWITCH, SIT *DOWN*--YOU'RE MAKIN' ME ANTSY. SO HOW'S THE SEARCH GOIN'?

OKAY. BUT I'M NOT GETTING ANY CLOSER TO LOCATING SPAWN.

KIK

THE PEOPLE I TALKED TO SAID THEY HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR AWHILE. HE'S JUST DISAPPEARED, AND NONE OF THE HOMELESS FOLKS COULD TELL ME IF OR WHEN HE'LL RETURN. THE ONLY *HOPEFUL* SIGN IS THAT HE'S DONE THIS ONCE BEFORE, SO IT'S FAIR TO ASSUME HE'LL APPEAR AGAIN.

AND HOW LONG WILL *THAT* TAKE? A WEEK? A MONTH? YOU CAN'T KEEP THIS CHARADE GOING FOREVER.

I KNOW, SIR. BUT I JUST CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO TELL HER.

SHE'S YOUR *WIFE*, TWITCH, YOU OWE HER THE *TRUTH*. AT SOME POINT THE MONEY'S GOING TO RUN OUT.

TEK

THEN WHAT?

LOOK, I'M NOT TRYING TO RUN YOUR LIFE, BUT WE BOTH KNOW THAT SOONER OR LATER THEY'LL FIND OUT WE WERE ***FIRED***.

THEN, THEY'LL BE WONDERING WHERE YOU'VE BEEN SPENDING ALL YOUR FREE TIME. YOU DON'T ***NEED*** THOSE COMPLICATIONS.

I GUESS I'M HOPING THAT IF WE FIND SPAWN AND SORT THROUGH THE WHOLE CHIEF BANKS SUICIDE FIASCO, THEN THE BOARD WILL SEE WE WERE ***WRONGLY*** DISMISSED, AND ***REINSTATE*** US.

PIZZA

FIRST OFF, ***SCREW*** THE BOARD AND THEIR JOBS. WE DON'T NEED 'EM. I'VE GOT BIGGER PLANS FOR US.

YOU JUST SIT HERE...

SQUISH

... I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

UM... MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT. I ALWAYS VOWED I WOULDN'T KEEP ANY SECRETS FROM HER.

THE SILLY THING IS, SHE'D PROBABLY UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY.

IT MUST BE SOME MALE THING, ME WANTING TO PROVIDE FOR THE FAMILY, TAKE CARE OF THEM.

DUNK'N DONUTS

AT LEAST YOU ***HAVE*** A FAMILY.

HERE, CATCH!

WHOOO...

OH MY GOD, WHAT IS THIS, SIR?!

A PIPE-DREAM.

SEE, I FIGURED THAT SOMEDAY I'D HAVE A WIFE. A FAMILY. A NICE LITTLE PICKET FENCE AROUND THE HOUSE. SO I TUCKED AWAY A PIECE OF EVERY PAYCHECK, WAITING FOR THE DREAM TO COME TRUE... BUT IT'S *NOT*. I REALIZED THAT A *WHILE* AGO.

IT'S *TOO LATE* FOR THAT DREAM. BUT I'VE ALWAYS HAD ANOTHER. ONE MORE REALISTIC.

SUCH AS?

MY OWN *AGENCY*. DOING PRIVATE DETECTIVE WORK.

SO YOU GO BACK TO THE FORCE IF YOU LIKE, BUT *I'M THROUGH*. IT'S JUST THAT... WELL... I THOUGHT IT'D BE GREAT IF I HAD A *PARTNER*.

LIKE *YOU*.

I LOVE YOU, TOO.

I *LOVE* YOU, *MAN!*

...I MEAN, SIR.

LEGEND HAS CALLED IT "THE BLACK DISPERSAL." THE DETAILS MAY DIFFER IN REGION, BUT THE ACT REMAINS FAIRLY CONSISTENT.

A SILENT SIGNAL GOES OUT, ALERTING ALL OCCUPANTS OF THE SHADOWED LANDS.

'LIGHT' IS TRESPASSING ONCE AGAIN.

HELLSPAWN! MOVE YOURSELF!

HE HASN'T BEGUN HIS REGENERATION, YET.

SO, THE UNWANTED VISITOR MUST BE DISTRACTED... LULLED INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY...

... UNTIL THEY HAVE LINGERED PAST THE POINT OF NO RETURN.

SNARED IN A HIDDEN TRAP.

CONDENSING ITS INTERNAL NEURO-SYSTEMS FLOW, THE HELLSPAWN FORCES EACH PLASM STRAND TO GATHER ITS DARK EVIL TO A SINGLE POINT:

...A CONCENTRATE OF PURE, MALICIOUS ENERGY.

IT IS THEN RELEASED, USUALLY THROUGH THE CHEST, IN A CONVULSIVE EXPLOSION THAT SHOWERS ITS INTENDED TARGET WITH THE UNSPEAKABLE AURA OF THE DAMNED.

6:7:8:6

NOW TAINTED, THE VICTIM BECOMES A BEACON.

FOR HER PART, THE ROGUE ANGEL IS NOW READY FOR HER FINAL STEP.

DO NOT GLOAT YET, HELLSPAWN. YOUR ***PATHETIC*** ENERGY STREAM WASN'T NEARLY STRONG ENOUGH.

YOU'VE FAILED ONCE AGAIN.

WHY DO YOU JUST STAND THERE?

SURELY YOU HAVEN'T SURRENDERED. SO-- WHAT NEW TRICK AWAITS ME ***NOW***?

THE "DISPERSAL": WHEN HELL'S OFFSPRING PASSES OFF THE ***PHYSICAL*** END OF BATTLE...

...TO THOSE THAT HEED THE BEACON'S SIREN CALL...

...THOSE EAGER TO CAST OUT ANY WHO SERVE THE LIGHT!

ANY WHO SERVE THE WILL OF GOD.

HRRR

SSS

HRNH!

SQUEE

SQUEE

KCHNK!

IT TAKES BUT MINUTES FOR THE 'CLEANSING' TO DRAW TO AN END--

-- THE GOAL ACHIEVED:

THE INTRUDER HAS BEEN BANISHED.

THE NIGHTBEASTS, THEIR MISSION FULFILLED, WANDER AWAY. NIGHT RESUMES ITS NATURAL BALANCE.

THIS IS INSANE.

HIS CLOAK WHIPS INTO THE COOL AIR, PROCLAIMING **VICTORY** WITH ITS DANCE.

SOUNDS GOOD.

OPEN UP. A BIT WIDER.

OKAY. THANK YOU, WANDA.

NOW LET'S CHECK THOSE EARS.

WELL, I DON'T SEE ANYTHING UNUSUAL. YOU DO HAVE A BIT OF STREP THROAT AND A MINOR VIRAL INFECTION, BUT OTHERWISE YOU'RE STRONG AS EVER. I'LL WRITE YOU OUT A PRESCRIPTION-- YOU'LL CLEAR UP IN A FEW DAYS.

SAY, HOW'S TERRY BEEN LATELY? YOU ***KNOW*** THAT HUSBAND OF YOURS DOESN'T GET IN HERE FOR HIS REGULAR CHECK-UPS. HOPE HE'S NOT PUSHING HIMSELF TOO HARD.

THINGS ***ARE*** PRETTY HECTIC FOR HIM RIGHT NOW.

I'LL PASS THE MESSAGE ALONG, DOCTOR BUSINO.

"UNFORTUNATELY, I THINK I'VE PASSED MY COUGH ON TO HIM."

KOFF KOFF

I SWEAR THESE LATE NIGHTS ARE GOING TO KILL ME YET.

AT LEAST I'M MAKING SOME HEADWAY.

ONE MORE THING TO TRACK... A PARTICULAR DEFENSE DEPARTMENT ARMS SHIPMENT. IT'LL LIST THE RECIPIENT NATIONS... AND TELL ME BY DEFAULT WHO *SHOULDN'T* HAVE THAT HARDWARE.

THEN, WITH A CROSS-CHECK ON NATO SATELLITE DATA, I'LL FIND IF ANYONE'S BEING CARELESS HIDING THEIR NEW TOYS.

CROSS-CHECKING THAT AGAINST OUR INTERNAL TRAVEL LOGS AND WHAT OUR CONTACTS AMONG THE ARMS MERCHANTS HAVE HEARD SHOULD POINT TO *SOMEONE* AT THIS OFFICE WHO'S SET UP A LITTLE BUSINESS ON THE SIDE.

LIKE WYNN. HE'S...

KOFF KOFF Hack KOFF KF

UGGH! I FEEL LIKE CRAP.

TERRY FITZGERALD WILL SOON WISH HE'D LISTENED TO HIS BODY.

HIS ALLEYS. HE'S COME BACK TO THEM. AGAIN.

HE CAN'T QUITE REMEMBER HOW LONG HE'S BEEN GONE. AWHILE. THAT'S ALL HE KNOWS. IT HAS BEEN AWHILE.

FOLLOWING HIS CAPTURE BY THE CURSE, AND HIS TRAVELS ACROSS FOUR STATES, HE HAS RETURNED HOME.

A REMINDER OF HIS ABDUCTION GREETS HIS RETURN.

POLICE CHIEF MITTS SUICIDES

ALL THIS MADNESS. THIS INSANITY. IT MUST BE SLOWED, HE THINKS.

IT'S TIME TO BE HOME, IN THE FURTHEST REACHES OF 'RAT CITY.'

YOU CAN'T RUN FROM IT, AL.

COG!

IT'S PART OF YOUR LIFE NOW. IT WON'T GO AWAY.

STILL, IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK.

THESE REAR WALLS... THIS PLACE... IT'S ALL I HAVE, NOW.

EVERYTHING ELSE IS OUT OF CONTROL. ESPECIALLY MY COSTUME. IT'S TAKEN OVER-- TAKEN ME OVER.

THEN WRESTLE IT BACK. ASSERT YOUR POWERS.

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK I'VE BEEN DOING?!

LOSING YOUR *GRIP*. YOUR UNIFORM NEEDS YOU AS MUCH AS YOU NEED *IT*. THE BOND CAN'T BE BROKEN... ONLY *REFORMED*.

YOUR SYMBIOTE IS *MORPHING*, AL. FASTER THAN IT SHOULD. YOU HAVE TO *SLOW* THE ACCELERATION. HARNESS ITS ENERGY. THEN FIGHT TO BECOME THE WARRIOR YOU *NEED* TO BE.

BUT WHY'S THE COSTUME DOING THIS?

SOMETHING MUST HAVE TRAUMATIZED IT. WHAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU WERE GONE?

WE WERE SEPARATED. THE CURSE TOOK US APART.

AND YOUR OTHER BATTLES?

I... I KILLED AN ANGEL. WELL, NO. IT WAS THE COSTUME. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE.

NOT THAT I TRIED TO FIGHT IT. THE ANGEL HAD IT COMING TO HER. HEAVEN SEEMS TO HAVE A PISSY ATTITUDE ABOUT SPAWNS.

THEIR HISTORY WITH GOD HASN'T BEEN VERY BENIGN.

THAT'S OBVIOUS.

MY BODY'S ALMOST HEALED NOW. EVERYTHING IS REATTACHED. HOPEFULLY, THE COSTUME WILL LET ME TAKE CHARGE NOW.

NO. IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE.

YOUR OUTER SHELL HAS ADVANCED *TOO FAR* TO RELINQUISH CONTROL. IT CRAVES *EVIL* -- YEARNS TO BE IN ITS PRESENCE. THAT'S HOW IT FEEDS -- HOW IT *LIVES*.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO NOW IS *TRAIN* IT. BECOME ITS *MASTER*. DO YOU UNDERSTAND? *NOT* ITS HOST. ITS ***MASTER***.

YOU HAVE TO HAVE CONTROL.

AND IF I DON'T?

THEN GOD HELP US ALL.

HOURS PASS IN SILENCE, AND AT LAST AL SIMMONS' MIND ACHIEVES THE EQUIVALENT OF SLEEP.

THEN IT MOVES... THE COSTUME...

...CAREFUL NOT TO WAKE ITS HOST-- TRYING TO FIND THE IDEAL SPOT.

A PLACE WHERE IT CAN GROW.

MULTIPLY.

THRIVE.

THEN THE LIVING CARAPACE SETTLES BACK DOWN, CONTENT TO HAVE FOUND A HOME FOR HIS WORMS. HIS CARRIERS.

HIS EVIL.

BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN.

...IT WAS SO CÜTE. SHE EVEN STAYED IN HER MESS LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO GET THE CAMERA.

HA-HA-HA...

...THAT'S GREAT YOU GOT A PICTURE OF IT. I'M SURE YOUR PARENTS WILL LOVE IT!

NO ONE! NOW GO SIT DOWN. I CAN TAKE CARE OF THIS.

WELL, YOU KNOW MOM. SHE'LL THINK SUZY IS TOO RAMBUNCTIOUS OR SOMETHING. BUT DAD'LL GET A BIG KICK OUT OF IT.

Ding-dong

I'LL GET IT!!

WHY? WHO IS IT?

'EVENING, JOHNNY. MR. GRAVANO WANTS TO HAVE A LITTLE *MEETING* WITH YOU. SAYS I SHOULD ARRANGE IT... WITH *YOUR* PERMISSION, OF COURSE.

HE'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR CURRENT WORK HABITS.

LOOK, BOYS. THERE'S BEEN A MISTAKE. I CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING.

GOOD.

IT'S JUST THAT I'M *BUSY* RIGHT NOW. WITH THE NEW BABY AND ALL. YOU UNDERSTAND.

VERY DISAPPOINTED.

I DO. TOO BAD, THOUGH. MR. GRAVANO WILL BE DISAPPOINTED.

OKAY. BUT NOT HERE. NOT IN FRONT OF MY WIFE AND KID.

JOHN? WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?

Um... JUST A SMALL PROBLEM AT WORK. NOTHING, REALLY. I NEED TO... uh... GET BACK TO THE OFFICE. SETTLE A FEW THINGS.

I'LL BE HOME LATE.

DO ME A FAVOR. TELL SUZY HOW MUCH I LOVE HER BEFORE YOU TUCK HER IN.

OF COURSE. WHEN WILL YOU BE BACK?

I'M NOT SURE. BUT DON'T WAIT UP. GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

Oh... ONE MORE THING. YOU LOOK BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT.

LET'S GO.

JOHN...?

THAT'S A LOVELY WIFE YOU HAVE. YOU'RE A LUCKY MAN.

THANKS.

HELLO, JOHNNY. I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU'D SIT IN THE FRONT.

YEAH, SURE, MR. BREWI.

A MINUTE PASSES.

WHY'RE WE JUST SITTING HERE?

JOHNNY TORRENZO'S WIFE RUSHES OUTSIDE. SHE'S HEARD THE SOUND BEFORE -- KNOWS ITS MEANING.

IT'LL BE A FULL TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE THE NEIGHBORS CALM HER HYSTERICS. ANOTHER HOUR BEFORE SHE STOPS CRYING.

THE POLICE WON'T BE GIVEN ENOUGH INFORMATION TO DO THEM ANY GOOD.

AND THE BLOOD-SOAKED SIDEWALK WILL EVENTUALLY FADE BUT NEVER QUITE LOSE ITS STAIN.

SLAM

WE'VE DONE THAT ERRAND FOR YOU, MR. GRAVANO... LEFT THE BODY RIGHT WHERE YOU SAID. AT THE HOME.

PERFECT. THE OTHERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WILL GET MY SUBTLE MESSAGE. JOHNNY WAS WAY TOO ***STUPID*** TO BE STEALING FROM ME ON HIS OWN. HE HAD HELP--AND MOST OF HIS GROUP LIVES IN THAT AREA.

NOW THEY KNOW I'M WATCHING... AND SOMEONE ***ALWAYS*** PANICS.

I WANT YOU TO BE THERE WHEN THEY *DO*. JOHNNY'S NOT GOING TO TAKE THIS FALL ALL BY HIMSELF.

YES, SIR.

IT'S A PITY, REALLY. I HAD SUCH HOPES FOR JOHNNY. STILL, WE ALL HAVE OUR OBLIGATIONS. HE ***FORGOT*** HIS.

LOOK AFTER THE PROPER ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIS FUNERAL-- AND EXPRESS MY CONDOLENCES TO HIS WIFE.

LET HER KNOW THAT SHE AND THE BABY WILL BE WELL TAKEN CARE OF. I ALWAYS PROVIDE FOR MY 'FAMILY.'

RINGG

YES?

*I AM PHONING ON BEHALF OF MR. BARTINO. HE HAS ASKED ME TO REMIND YOU THAT YOU WERE TO HAVE RETURNED HIS **PROPERTY** BY NOW.*

*MR. BARTINO DOES NOT APPRECIATE **TARDINESS**, AS I'M SURE YOU ARE AWARE.*

*YOU SEE, MR. GRAVANO, IN SICILY HAVE OUR OWN CODE OF HONOR... ONE WHICH DOES NOT TEMPT THE FATES. WE EXPECT THE PROMPT RETURN OF **OVERTKILL**. DO NOT DISAPPOINT US. GOODBYE.*

EVERY DEVIL HAS ITS MASTER. VITO GRAVANO HAS JUST BEEN REMINDED THAT HE IS NO EXCEPTION.

THEY'D BEEN BROUGHT TO THE REEKING ALLEYWAY FOR A PURPOSE:

TO GIVE HIM **STRENGTH.** TO ACT AS A CATALYST, INDUCING THE FREE FLOW OF **BLACK ENERGY** TO AID IN HIS RECOVERY.

BUT FIRST, THEY MUST **MULTIPLY.** THEIR NUMBERS MUST **THRIVE** IN THIS NEW ENVIRONMENT. THAT WILL TAKE TIME.

SO, FOR THE MOMENT, THEY ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO THEIR SURROUND-INGS--

-- NOTHING MORE THAN **FOOD** TO THE CREATURES THEY'LL SOON **OUTRANK**--

-- PHYSICAL NOURISH-MENT RATHER THAN POWERFUL MYSTIC CONDUITS.

SOON, THOUGH. VERY SOON, IT WILL BE UNDERSTOOD-- THEY MUST BE SHOWN **RESPECT.** THEY HAVE **A MASTER.**

OVER TWO HUNDRED MILES THE LIVING COSTUME HAD CARRIED THEM, HIDDEN IN THE FOLDS OF ITS BLOOD-RED CLOAK, EVER CAREFUL TO CRADLE THEM IN A BED OF DARK, RICH SOIL.

THEY CARRY A RESOURCE ESSENTIAL TO ITS CONTINUED EXISTENCE...

...AND THAT OF ITS HOST, THE LATE LIEUTENANT-COLONEL AL SIMMONS:

EVIL. THE WORMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE SPONGES FOR IT. DWELLING UNDER-GROUND, HIDDEN FROM GOD'S LIGHT, THEY ABSORB THE AURA OF WICKEDNESS.

IN THESE GENTLE BURROWERS, THE DEVIL FOUND A BACK-DOOR INTO GOD'S CREATION. THEY DRAW NOURISHMENT FROM THE SOIL ALONE-- THEY HAVE NO USE FOR THE SUN--

-- SO THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN TAINTED.

THEY ARE, IN EFFECT, BOTTLED SIN.

HEY, LARRY! LOOK--

--ITS... ITS--

OH HOLY MOTHER!!

RUN!!

THE MASTER OF THE NIGHT-CRAWLERS FEEDS **CONTINUALLY** NOW, SLOWLY DRAINING EACH WORM OF ITS DARK NECTAR.

THE HELLSPAWN-- WHICH IS TO SAY, HIS OUTER SHELL-- IS REBUILDING STRENGTH LOST AS A RESULT OF THEIR BRUTAL **SEPARATION.** *

* ISSUE 40 -- Tom.

AT THE SAME TIME, AT THE CORE OF THEIR UNION, HOST AND SYMBIOTE ARE IN A STRUGGLE FOR **SUPREMACY.**

IT'S THAT CONDITION WHICH INTERESTS ANOTHER OF THE ALLEY'S RESIDENTS.

QUEENS, NEW YORK... THE HOME OF AL'S WIDOW...

WELL, ACCORDING TO THIS, EVERYTHING SHOULD BE APPROVED BY NEXT WEEK.

WE'LL HAVE THE FINAL PERMITS IN HAND, ALLOWING US TO START BUILDING THE CHILDRENS' WING. I CAN'T BELIEVE IT-- AFTER ALL THIS TIME, IT'S ACTUALLY GOING TO *HAPPEN!*

IT'LL MEAN *SO MUCH* TO THE HOSPITAL-- NOT TO MENTION OUR *VOLUNTEERS*. I THINK A FEW PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO *DOUBT*...

DADT! DAD! DA-DA!

I'M SORRY, SWEETIE. DADDY WON'T BE HOME FOR A WHILE.

WRONG.

I STILL FEEL LIKE CRAP. CAN'T SEEM TO SHAKE THIS FLU.

DR. BUSCINO KEEPS ASKING YOU TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT.

TERRY?! WHY ARE YOU HERE?

I KNOW, I KNOW. I JUST HAVEN'T HAD THE TIME.

DAD-DA! DAD-DA! DAD-DA!

I'LL TRY FOR NEXT WEEK.

HEY, CYAN! HOW'S MY LITTLE GIRL? YOU BEING GOOD FOR YOUR MOM?

YESH.

GOOD. NOW HOW 'BOUT A HELICOPTER RIDE BEFORE I LIE DOWN.

'COPTER! 'COPTER!

ANY MORE NEWS ON YOUR PERMITS?

EVERY-THING'S SET. THE CONTRACTOR BEGINS IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS.

AND YOU *STILL* DON'T HAVE A CLUE WHO GAVE THAT BIG DONATION.

NOPE. I GUESS SOME PEOPLE ARE JUST SHY.

AFTER A FEW MINUTES OF PLAYTIME, TERRY RETIRES TO THE BEDROOM. HE'S BEEN HIDING HIS SICKNESS QUITE WELL.

KOFF KOFF KOFF HACK

OH, MAN...

A FEW NIGHTS LATER.

HIS NAME IS CHRIS PRONGER, BUT THOSE WHO KNOW HIM USE A DIFFERENT NAME:

'ORCA.'

Jimmy's SPORTS BAR AND GRILL

SEE YA 'ROUND, EDDIE.

BUILT LIKE A **WHALE** AND ONE HELL OF A **KILLER.**

KILLER WHALE. ORCA. GET IT?

PLENTY OF **VICTIMS** HAVE. THAT'S WHY HE'S BECOME SO VALUABLE TO VITO GRAVANO.

HE FOLLOWS ORDERS WITH SKILL AND PRECISION.

HE NEVER LEAVES ANY LOOSE ENDS.

HE'S LONG SINCE LOST TRACK OF THE BODY COUNT.

WHA...?

HIS 'HIT' ON JOHNNY PASQUALI WAS JUST ANOTHER GIG.

WHATEVER THE NUMBER, IT'S JUST BEEN **CAPPED.**

EARLY THE NEXT MORNING...

DON'T LIE TO ME, YOU LITTLE *PUKE!* I'M GETTING *TIRED* OF ALL THESE STUPID EXCUSES!

PLEASE... I SWEAR... I DON'T HAVE YOUR MONEY. N-NOT TODAY... I GET TOMORROW.

YOU FRIGGIN' LIAR! I'LL GET IT MYSELF. WHERE *IS* IT? IN THE BACK ROOM?

SOMETHING *WEIRD* GOING ON HERE. MR. GARBONE *ALWAYS* PAYS HIS 'PROTECTION' BILL. NICE AND QUIET, LIKE. NEVER A PROBLEM.

MR. GRAVANO AIN'T GOING TO LIKE IT IF SOMEONE'S TRYING TO SQUEEZE INTO HIS TURF.

GRRRRR

Uh?

WHAT NOW? SOME GODDAMN DOG?

NO.

I WANT HIM DEAD!! DO YOU HEAR ME?! FIND OUT WHO HE IS AND KILL HIM!

VITO GRAVANO

THIS SIDE UP

VERY FRAGILE

VITO GRAVANO

S SIDE UP

AND I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT TOMORROW OR NEXT WEEK. I WANT THIS SONOFABITCH GUTTED TONIGHT!

BAM!

SOMEONE'S JUST STARTED A WAR. FIND OUT WHO HE WORKS FOR BECAUSE I PLAN TO OBLITERATE HIS ASS.

NO ONE TOUCHES MY BOYS AND LIVES TO TELL ABOUT IT.

NOW DISPOSE OF THAT BOX AND WHEN YOU'RE DONE TELL VINNIE I'M SHORT ON PROTECTION. GET HIM TO COLLECT A FEW RESUMES.

YES, SIR.

THIS SIDE

VITO GRAVANO

TH

"HOW DO YOU *KNOW* SHE WAS DEAD?"

"BELIEVE ME, SHE WAS DEAD. THE ANIMALS STRIPPED HER BONES OF PRACTICALLY ALL FLESH. SHE'S GONE."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, '*HER BONES*'?"

HER SKELETON. IT WAS STREWN ALL OVER THE PLACE.

YOU *STILL* DON'T GET IT, DO YOU? YOU DIDN'T KILL ANY ANGEL.* SHE'S STILL ALIVE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

ANGELS DON'T *HAVE* BONES. THEY'RE LIKE *YOU*-- MADE OF SOME KIND OF [illegible]. THE ONLY WAY TO VANQUISH ONE OF THEM IS TO ABSORB THEIR *LIGHT*, WHICH YOU DIDN'T DO. WHAT'S WORSE, SHE COULD BE ANYWHERE. YOU SEE, THEY SHAPE-SHIFT. AND BECAUSE OF YOUR NECROPLASM'S EMISSIONS, SHE CAN FIND YOU IN A *HEARTBEAT*.

MAYBE SHE'S ALREADY HERE WAITING FOR YOU. AS A BUM. A HOOKER. A DOG. ANYTHING. AND YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT.

SO NOW WHAT?

Oh, FOR THE *LOVE* OF *PETE!!* *LEARN*, DAMMIT, YOU'RE A *SPAWN* NOW. AS MUCH AS YOU'D LIKE TO BE HUMAN AGAIN, THAT'S *LONG* GONE. PEOPLE, CREATURES, THINGS, HEAVEN ITSELF-- THEY'RE *ALL* GUNNING FOR YOU. IF ONE FAILS, ANOTHER PICKS UP THE SLACK.

BUT YOU KEEP THINKING SMALL. IGNORING THE SIGNS. YOU'RE CAUGHT IN A *GAME*, AL, ONE YOU CAN'T POSSIBLY CONTROL. HEAVEN, HELL-- *THEY* RUN THE SHOW. US ON EARTH, WE'RE JUST THE MIDDLEMEN.

SO WHAT'S THE POINT?

TO FIGHT FOR WHAT'S *RIGHT!!* THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE-- BECAUSE YOU FOUGHT TO RETURN TO YOUR WIFE. BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED.

THAT'S WHAT'S RIGHT!

WHAT ABOUT THE REST? TERRY. VIOLATOR. ANGELA. EVEN JASON WYNN-- WHO, YOU SAID, MIGHT NOT BE THE ONE WHO ORDERED MY DEATH. WHAT ARE THEY?

PIECES TO THE PUZZLE. YOU CAN'T DETERMINE WHAT TO FIGHT FOR UNLESS YOU HAVE ANSWERS. EACH OF THEM CAN PROVIDE YOU SOME.

LISTEN, COG, EVERY TIME I TRY AND CATCH MY BREATH, SOMETHING NEW'S ATTACKING. I'M A MAN, THOUGH YOU CAN TELL ME OTHERWISE. WELL, THAT'S ALL I HAVE LEFT, AND IF I STOP BELIEVING THAT, I SWEAR I'LL CRACK.

THEN DON'T.

IN THE MEANTIME, FIGHT. FIGHT *ALL* OF THIS. BUT REMEMBER THERE IS A REPERCUSSION TO YOUR EVERY ACTION. YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN HOW QUICKLY EVENTS CAN SPIN OUT OF CONTROL.

THAT'S WHAT HELL WANTS. FOR YOU TO BE CONFUSED. ANGRY. *VICIOUS*. TO ACT ON *INSTINCT*.

SO FAR, YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING RIGHT INTO THE DEVIL'S HANDS.

LIKE THESE *WORMS*. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FOR?

TO SIPHON EVIL! *THAT'S* WHAT YOUR COSTUME'S DOING.

I-- I **NEED** THEM.

YES, YOU DO-- BUT NOT *THIS* WAY. NOT WHILE YOUR UNIFORM IS CALLING THE SHOTS.

YOU WANT TO BE A MAN. THEN OPEN YOUR EYES AND *LEARN*.

"INTERESTING"? IS THAT SUPPOSED TO BE A COMPLI-MENT, VINNIE?

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEANT. IT'S JUST THAT I'VE NEVER HAD TWO AT THE SAME TIME. YOU AND MARILYN ARE SOMETHING SPECIAL.

I ABOUT HAD A HEART ATTACK.

WE'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN.

NOW *THAT* WAS INTERESTING.

HEY--?! WHERE YOU GOING?

GOTTA TAKE A DUMP.

HOW ROMANTIC.

uh--? WHAT'S THAT NOISE? SOUNDS LIKE THE PORCELIN IS CRACKING.

I DIDN'T *FART* THAT LOUD, DID I?

PIPES SNAP. BRICK AND MORTAR EXPLODE.

SKRAASH!

VINNIE IS BARELY ABLE TO COVER HIS EYES BEFORE BEING SUCKED OUTWARD.

BEFORE THE DUST SETTLES, HE HEARS IT. THE **MONSTER**. ITS LOW GROWLS. LIKE SOME RAGING BULL. THEN HE FEELS ITS **BREATH** ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK.

HE'S NOT SURE HE SHOULD LOOK UP, BECAUSE WHATEVER HORROR IT IS HOVERING OVER HIM DOESN'T SMELL EVEN **REMOTELY** HUMAN.

MAKE ONE SOUND AND I'LL SKIN YOU WHERE YOU STAND.

VINNIE BOLBANI BITES HIS LIPS SO HARD THEY BLEED.

WORD IS YOU HAVE THE INFORMATION I'M LOOKING FOR

ALMOST TO THE POINT OF SCREAMING, HE CATCHES HIMSELF-- AND INSTEAD DEPOSITS ANOTHER 'PARCEL' IN THE TOILET BOWL.

LATER...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE GOOD OL' DAYS WHEN THE WORD *RESPECT* ACTUALLY MEANT SOME-THING?

WHAT A DAY.

NO MOVING IN ON SOME-ONE ELSE'S TERRITORY. NO STEALING FROM THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU. RULES WERE MEANT TO BE FOLLOWED. BUT I GUESS...

HELLO VITO

JEEZ- US.

LONG TIME, NO SEE

DON'T BOTHER ASKING HOW I FOUND YOU. I HAD HELP FROM ONE OF YOUR LOYAL RATS.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN A MAN WOULD SOONER DIE THAN BETRAY YOU.

YOUR HELP'S GETTING SOFT.

VINNIE! YOU TRAITOR!

VITO, I DIDN'T HAVE A CHOICE.

HE'S RIGHT HE DIDN'T SEE THREATS AND TORTURE CAN BE VERY COMPELLING. YOU REMEMBER THAT, DON'T YOU, VITO?

HOW YOU GOT TO ME BY THREATENING MY FAMILY. YOU AND YOUR DAMN SCIENTISTS TRYING TO BUILD YOUR "PERFECT HITMAN."

AND EVEN AFTER YOU HAD ME. EVEN AFTER I SAID I'D DO IT, YOU KILLED THEM! MY WIFE. MY KIDS. EVERYONE. JUST SO YOU COULD PROTECT YOUR ASS.

WELL, NOW IT'S PAY-BACK!!

NOT *QUITE*, RICHARD. I KNEW YOU'D RETURN SOMEDAY, SO I PLANNED AHEAD. YOUR BROTHER DAVID-- HE'S *STILL ALIVE* AND I KNOW WHERE HE IS...

...*AND*, BETTER YET, HE'S TO BE SLAUGHTERED IF ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY WERE TO HAPPEN TO ME.

KRAK!

LIKE A CREATURE MAULING MEEE

UMPH!

LIAR! DAVID'S DEAD

EVEN WHEN YOU WORKED FOR ME I KNEW YOU DIDN'T HAVE THE *BACKBONE.*

I SAID SHUT UP!

WHOOO...

THIS ISN'T OVER VITO. I'LL BE BACK.

YOU'RE A *FAILURE,* RICHARD! YOU COULDN'T DO YOUR *JOB,* OR PROTECT YOUR *FAMILY...* YOU EVEN SCREWED UP OUR *EXPERIMENT!*

HA HA HA HA HA HA

*THE CREATURE KNOWN AS TREMOR LEAVES. NOT BECAUSE HE'S AFRAID, BUT BECAUSE HE **KNOWS** VITO. HOW HE **WORKS.** HE WOULDN'T LIE ABOUT DAVID BEING STILL ALIVE.*

SO HE NEEDS TIME TO THINK. TO PLAN. BEFORE COMING BACK FOR VITO.

VINNIE IS GOING TO HELP HIM.

OH GOD. OH, GOD. OH, GOD.

BOSS, WHY'D YOU LET HIM GO?

BECAUSE, GENTLEMEN, WE NEED TO PREPARE FOR HIS *RETURN.* I NEED HIM BACK IN *ONE PIECE.*

SICILY IS LOOKING TO GET OVERTKILL BACK. WELL, WITH A FEW SMALL ADJUSTMENTS, I'LL BE ABLE TO DELIVER A *BRAND NEW* VERSION.

ONE DEVOID OF ANY HUMAN BRAIN.

Oh, GOD. Oh, GOD.

SPAWN, I NEED HELP. YOURS.

QUIET! VITO IS MY PROBLEM, I KNOW, BUT I THOUGHT YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN HEARING A FEW NAMES FROM VINNIE HERE. HE'S A FOUNTAIN OF KNOWLEDGE.

WHERE DO YOU GET OFF...?!

WHAT WERE THOSE NAMES AGAIN, VINNIE?

WANDA BLAKE. TERRY FITZGERALD. CYAN FITZGERALD. JASON WYNN.

THAT'S ENOUGH.

SO WHAT DO YOU SAY NOW, PARTNER

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NAMES.

THAT'S ALL HE HAD. NO DETAILS. JUST NAMES.

HE'D HEARD THEM ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO. BUT THAT'S ALL THEY WERE TO HIM, NAMES. AS HEAD OF VITO GRAVANO'S PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT, VINNIE ONLY ASSIGNED MEN AS NEEDED FOR EACH SURVEILLANCE. BEYOND THAT, HE WAS OUT OF THE LOOP.

STILL, THE LIST WAS QUITE CONCISE: TERRY FITZGERALD... WANDA BLAKE... CYAN FITZGERALD... JASON WYNN.

TREMOR HAD HOPED THEY WOULD BE ENOUGH WHEN VINNIE RATTLED THEM OFF TO SPAWN. ENOUGH TO ENLIST SPAWN'S HELP IN A BATTLE AGAINST MAFIA DON VITO GRAVANO.

BUT THE ENIGMATIC HERO WANTED DETAILS. SO HE 'PURSUADED' VINNIE TO IDENTIFY THE THUG IN CHARGE OF THAT PARTICULAR SURVEILLANCE.

THEN, HE ORDERED TREMOR TO FIND THE MAN, ONE BILLY SCAMBINO.

SPAWN NEEDED TO 'TALK' WITH BILLY.

ENRAGED, TREMOR THEN LEFT.

HERE HE IS!

AND THIS ONE **DOES** HAVE ALL YOUR ANSWERS. BUT I'M WARNING YOU, IF YOU CHOOSE TO IGNORE ANY OF THIS, I'LL MAKE SURE EVERYONE KNOWS WHERE YOU CAN BE FOUND.

LISTEN, SMARTASS. THE MAFIA HAS AN ARMY OF GRUNTS THAT'LL CLOG THESE ALLEYS SO TIGHT YOU WON'T HAVE A CHANCE TO BREATHE.

THAT'S NOT COUNTING WHAT I'M PLANNING ON DOING TO YOU.

SO? YOU GOING TO HELP ME OR WHAT?

A CROOKED SMIRK CUTS ACROSS SPAWN'S DISFIGURED FACE.

OH, REALLY.

YAAAH!

FIRST, GET OUT OF MY FACE. I DON'T TAKE VERY KINDLY TO THREATS.

FINE. BUT HE'S THE LAST, YOU UNDERSTAND. THEN, I WANT YOUR ANSWER.

I DIDN'T THINK THIS WAS GOING TO TO TURN INTO SOME GODDAMNED ORDEAL.

THERE ISN'T TIME FOR THAT.

THEN WE'LL JUST HAVE TO FIND SOME.

SO? WHAT'D YOU DO WITH VINNIE?

Oh, HE'S BEEN TAKEN CARE OF, BELIEVE ME.

IT'S OUR NEW PAL I WANT YOU TO FOCUS ON, NOW.

HELLO, BILLY.

Oh, GOD.

DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE?

PLEASE, I - I DIDN'T DO...

AA!

SILENCE! YOU'VE GOT EXACTLY THREE SECONDS TO GATHER YOUR WITS -- OR ELSE I'M GOING TO RIP OUT YOUR LIVER AND FEED IT TO TREMOR, HERE.

→gulp←

VINNIE GAVE ME THE GIG A FEW MONTHS BACK. KEEP AN EYE ON THIS DUDE TERRY, AND HIS WIFE AND KID. SOMETHING ABOUT HIM BEING *YOU*. BUT HE WASN'T.

THINGS GOT A BIT MESSY FOR AWHILE, THOUGH.* VITO STILL BELIEVES THE GUY'S CONNECTED TO YOU SOMEHOW. ANOTHER TEAM STILL FOLLOWS HIM.

I *SWEAR* THAT'S IT.

I DOUBT IT. WHAT ABOUT JASON WYNN?

* ISSUES 21 TO 25 -- Tom.

DON'T KNOW HIM, BUT I THINK HE'S THE ONE FEEDING GRAVANO HIS INFOOOOOO

THANK YOU.

NOW TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THOSE NAMES.

OF COURSE. YEAH. SURE.

THAT'S ENOUGH! YOU WANT ANY MORE FROM HIM, GET IT LATER. I NEED THAT ANSWER NOW.

CAN I COUNT ON YOUR HELP?

CRAVING GRAVANO'S ANSWERS TO YET OTHER QUESTIONS, SPAWN DECIDES.

FOR TONIGHT.

...AND WHEN I HEARD ABOUT YOUR PAL *CHIEF BANKS*, I ABOUT PISSED MYSELF. VENTILATING HIS *OWN HEAD** WHAT A KOOK!

*ISSUE 45--Tom.

I *MEAN*-- SELF-MUTI*LA*TION?! THAT'S A BIG, *BIG* COMMITTMENT. A FELLA'S GOTTA FEEL *PRET*TY LONELY TO CHOOSE ETERNAL DAMNATION. THE *BIG GUY* UPSTAIRS, HE'S NOT MUCH *INTO* SOULS WITH SUICIDAL TENDENCIES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, MY EX-BOSS, *WELL!* HE'S A *VERY* FORGIVIN' KINDA DUDE.

THIP

THAT'S *IF* HE MAKES IT TO MALEBOLGIA'S LEVEL.

WRR

AN' YOU WANNA HEAR THE *FUNNIEST* PART? GOOD OL' BANKS DIDN'T EVEN LEAVE A MESS ON THE WALL. KNOW *WHY?*

'CAUSE HE *DIDN'T HAVE ANY* BRAINS! HA HEE HEE HO HO HO! GET IT?! HE TRIED TO BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT BUT HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE... HEE HEE HEE-HEE!

IS THERE A POINT TO ANY OF THIS?

Oh, I THINK I'M GONNA FART--!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, JASON? CAN'T LAUGH AT YOUR *OWN* SKULL-DUGGERY?

HERE'S THE *POINT!* *SPAWN'S* BACK IN TOWN. EVEN YOUR OWN MEN DON'T KNOW IT YET.

HE'S RETURNED TO THE ALLEYWAYS. HE HAS TO--OR AT LEAST HIS *SYMBIOTE* DOES. IT'S NO ACCIDENT MALEBOLGIA DUMPED HIM IN THAT FILTH. BUT *THAT'S* ANOTHER STORY.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS THAT HE'S WEAK. *VULNERABLE.*

THAT'S WHERE *YOU* COME IN.

HIS COSTUME IS MORPHING, *ALREADY.* THAT SHOULDN'T BE HAPPENING... WHICH IS GOOD FOR *US.* *NOW* ALL'S WE HAVE TO DO IS TRIGGER IT SOMEHOW, THEN...

POOF! RIGHT *BACK* TO HELL HE GOES!

HEE-HEE-HOOEE HEOOOWW!

'SCUSE ME, I'M A BIT EXCITED.

*ANY*HOW, WE NEED HIM TO LOSE CONTROL SOME WAY-- OR BETTER YET, TO SPILL A BUNCH OF *POWER!* *THAT'D* REALLY POP HIS BUBBLE! Oh, THIS IS GONNA BE *GREAT!!*

SO WHAT'YA SAY?

DO I HAVE A CHOICE?

NOT REALLY. I'M JUST HUMORING YOU.

THEN I'M IN. BUT LET ME ASK A QUESTION. WITH YOUR POWERS, WHY NOT DO IT ON YOUR OWN?

WOW! ARE YOU EVER *DENSE!* LET ME SHARE SOMETHING WITH YOU, WYNN.

IN A STRAIGHT ONE-ON-ONE FIGHT, I'D CLEAN THE GUY'S *CLOCK.* BUT THAT WON'T GET ME WHAT I WANT.

WHICH IS--?

ACKNOWLEDG-MENT FROM MY FORMER *BOSS.* SEE, HE SEEMS TO THINK THAT *HUMANS* HAVE A BETTER CHANCE AT LEADING US INTO THE 'FINAL WAR'!

INTELLIGENCE. SAVVY. CUNNING. HE USES A BUNCH OF FANCY WORDS TO SOFTEN THE BLOW, BUT IT BOILS DOWN TO THE SAME THING: HE THINKS THESE HUMANS'RE SMARTER THAN US... HIS OWN CHILDREN.

YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THAT CAN GIVE A GUY A COMPLEX.

SO... POUNDING SPAWN INTO DOGFOOD AIN'T GOING TO CUT IT, NO SIREE!

HAVE TO SHOW MALEBOLGIA THAT I CAN BEAT THEM WITH BRAINS, NOT BRAWN. SCREW WITH THEM. TRIP 'EM UP SOMEHOW. AN' MAYBE IF IT HAPPENS ENOUGH TIMES HE'LL SEE WHO THE TRUE LEADERS ARE:

US! THOSE OF US BORN IN HELL. NOT THOSE SENT THERE. SEE, I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF STINKING FOREIGNERS TAKING OUR JOBS!

HELL WAS BUILT ON OUR SWEAT AND BLOOD. WE DESERVE TO BE THE OFFICERS!-- THE GENERALS!-- FOR THE GREAT WAR, NOT THEM! IT MAKES ME WANNA PUKE!

URP!

UH-oh, HERE IT COMES.

THAT'S FASCINATING.

DON'T BE SO SMUG, WYNN.

YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'LL SOLVE MY PROBLEMS: POWER. I KNOW YOU LUST FOR IT, TOO, SO STOP ACTING LIKE I'M SOME WEIRDO, 'CAUSE I LOOK AT YOUR PICTURE EVERY NIGHT FOR INSPIRATION.

LET'S GET SOMETHING STRAIGHT, CLOWN.

I'VE SET EVENTS IN MOTION THAT'LL TUMBLE LIKE DOMINOS, GAINING MOMENTUM UNTIL THEY FINALLY HIT OUR TARGET, SPAWN.

MY BIGGEST PROBLEM HASN'T BEEN BELIEVING YOU HAVE THE CAPABILITIES, BUT KNOWING WHEN TO ACTUALLY TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY.

BELIEVE ME, JASON, I'M SERIOUS. ***DEADLY*** SERIOUS.

THOUGH I'VE ***ENJOYED*** MY FREELANCE TIME, HELL'S WHERE I BELONG TOO. NEAR THE ***REAL*** ACTION: ***ARMAGEDDON***. THE ***APOCALYPSE***. CALL IT WHAT YOU WILL. I PLAN ON BEING ON THE WINNING SIDE.

ENDING GOD'S REIGN *FOREVER.*

IT MIGHT TAKE A MILLENNIUM OR TWO TO DO IT. *Sooo*, IN THE MEAN-TIME, WHY NOT HAVE A BIT OF FUN... INSTEAD OF BEING A TIGHTASS LIKE *YOU*, WYNN.

STARTING WITH BUCKWHEAT, HERE.

EXCUSE ME... *OW!* MAY I SAY SOMETHING?

GO AHEAD.

FIRST TIME IN A LIMO, DR. GALACKAWITZ?

NOT ONE *THIS* SMALL. NOW SHUT UP AND DRIVE.

BZZT! *OW!* BZZT! *HEE-HEE!* BZZT! *OW!* BZZT! *HEE-HEE!*

HE SURVEYS THE INVENTORY INTENTLY.

HERE, IN THE DEEPEST RECESSES OF NEW YORK CITY'S FILTH-LADEN ALLEYS, EXISTS AN AREA EVEN THE HOMELESS RARELY TREAD.

"RAT CITY" IS WHAT THEY CALL IT. NO ONE WANTS TO BE CAUGHT HERE.

BFI

HE'S REGRESSING. BUILDING A BARRICADE.

TRYING TO SHUT HIMSELF AWAY FROM THE WORLD--THE '*LIGHT*'. MAYBE AL'S COSTUME HAS TAKEN OVER FOR GOOD.

IF SO, THERE'S LITTLE HOPE.

FUNNY, I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT FINALLY BE *THE ONE*. GUESS I'M LOSING MY SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE THESE DAYS.

DAMN YOU, MALEBOLGIA.

HOW *MANY* CHILDREN DO YOU NEED FOR YOUR ACCURSED WAR?

A LITTLE PAST 11 P.M. ...

ANYTHING ELSE I NEED TO KNOW, MR. GRAVANO?

THE GROUNDS HAVE BEEN SECURE FOR THE PAST FEW DAYS, BUT EVERYONE HAS ORDERS TO LET TREMOR SLIP THROUGH. I WANT HIM TO FEEL A FALSE SENSE OF ACCOMPLISH-MENT BEFORE I PULL THE NOOSE TIGHT AROUND HIS NECK.

AM I TO KILL HIM?

THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY. I HAVE OTHER PLANS. YOU SEE, THE CARTEL BACK IN SICILY IS LOOKING FOR THE RETURN OF OVERTKILL. SINCE WE'VE BEEN UNABLE TO LOCATE THEIR MACHINE, I NEED TO BUY SOME TIME.

SO, HE DOESN'T KNOW IT YET, BUT TREMOR'S ABOUT TO *COMPLETE* THE EXPERI-MENT WE STARTED ON HIM YEARS AGO.*

HOW DO YOU KNOW HE'LL RETURN?

BELIEVE ME... I KNOW HIS KIND. THEY'RE SO DAMNED *PREDICTABLE.*

THE ENTIRE PLACE IS COVERED. I'LL KNOW THE *SECOND* HE ARRIVES.

NOT EVERY OPTION HAS BEEN COVERED.

* ISSUE 25 -- Tom

KA-KK

IT'S TIME, VITO!

KRA-

YOU TELL ME WHERE YOU'VE HIDDEN MY BROTHER. I WANT THE CITY. THE COUNTRY. EVERYTHING!

AND IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT SCREWING WITH ME, EVEN A LITTLE, STOP AND CONSIDER THIS.

YOU TOOK MY FAMILY FROM ME. I'LL DO THE SAME FOR YOU.

SEE, I KNOW WHERE YOUR EX-WIFE LIVES.

SRUNCH!

TOUCH HER, YOU'RE *DEAD!*

THEN TELL ME WHERE DAVID IS!

SPOOM

GHK

MR. GRAVANO! YOU ALRIGHT?

I'M FINE.

BUT HE CAME HERE, CARRYING ON LIKE I SAID HE WOULD-- MAKING A MOCKERY OF YOUR BROTHER'S MEMORY.

TIME FREEZES FOR TREMOR. WHAT HE SEES CANNOT BE.

DAVID...? IS IT REALLY YOU?!

LISTEN, YOU FREAK. IF YOU'RE TO TRY AND PLAY LIKE YOU'RE MY BROTHER--***FORGET IT!*** IT WON'T WORK!

SEE, WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING THIS FOR QUITE SOME TIME... EVER SINCE YOUR ESCAPE OVERSEAS.

I'M JUST GLAD THEY LET ME BE INVOLVED TO...

NOW WHAT?!

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

IT'S MY LITTLE SURPRISE.

BACK-UPS? IS THAT WHAT YOU'VE BROUGHT-- YOUR OWN ARMY?

NO. JUST ONE MORE.

PERFECT! IT SEEMS I'LL BE BAGGING TWO IN ONE NIGHT. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DAVID?

YES, SIR.

DAVID, PLEASE, I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD. AFTER THEY KILLED ANNA-MARIE AND THE BABY, THEY WIPED OUT THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

HOW'D YOU ESCAPE?

SCREW YOU!!

MY BROTHER'S *DEAD* BECAUSE OF YOU. I *SAW* HIS BODY... OR WHAT YOU *LEFT* OF IT.

AND I DIDN'T *ESCAPE*...

...THE MAFIA *RESCUED* ME... GAVE ME A CHANCE TO BIDE MY TIME WHILE I WAITED FOR MY *REVENGE!*

THE WAIT IS OVER. SAY YOUR PRAYERS.

OUTSIDE.

DAVID, PLEASE. IT'S ME, RICHARD!

MY BROTHER'S DEAD!

BLAM BLAM

SCH

BLAM BLAM BLAM

SCH

BLAM

SCH

SCH

SPCH

SPAT

THINKING THEY'VE CORNERED THEIR GHOST, VITO'S MEN CONVERGE IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT.

TONIGHT, THEY'LL BE TAUGHT THE FIRST LESSON OF THE HELLSPAWN:

YOU CAN'T KILL WHAT IS ALREADY DEAD.

DAVID, DON'T DO THIS.

OR *WHAT*? YOU'LL KILL ME *TOO*? VITO HAS EXPLAINED EVERYTHING.

UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T GET TO KILL YOU. YOU'RE TAKING OVERTKILL'S PLACE.

AND THE SHOOTING OUT-SIDE? IT'S STOPPED. WHATEVER HELP YOU WERE LOOKING FOR HAS JUST BEEN *GREASED*.

I WOULDN'T SAY THAT. NOW DROP THE GUN.

WHO THE CHRIST ARE YOU?

I SAID, DROP THE GUN.

OKAY! OKAY!

YOU'RE MAKING A *BIG* MISTAKE, HERO, BUSTIN' IN HERE LIKE THIS. YOU JUST TOLD ME YOU'VE GOT A *DEATH WISH!*

DO US BOTH A FAVOR, VITO, AND SHUT UP. I'M MAKING THE RULES NOW. THE FIRST IS, I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE TRYING TO KILL MY ASSOCIATES...

...OR HOUNDING INNOCENT PEOPLE.

I'VE ALREADY WARNED YOU ONCE, VITO.* OBVIOUSLY, I DIDN'T MAKE MYSELF CLEAR ENOUGH.

WHEN I SAID LEAVE ME ALONE, THAT INCLUDED THOSE AROUND ME.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE...

*ISSUE 24--Tom.

5

=tsk tsk= YOU'RE NOT LISTENING, VITO. LET'S SEE IF I CAN'T MAKE MYSELF A BIT CLEARER.

ANYONE-- AND I MEAN **ANYONE**-- COMES CLOSE TO WANDA BLAKE OR HER FAMILY, I COME BACK HERE FOR YOU. UNDERSTOOD?

YOU DON'T SCARE ME, FREAK.

THEN YOU'RE A STUPID MAN, GRAVANO.

SEE, I KNOW THINGS. THINGS YOU DON'T WANT YOUR SICILIAN COUSINS TO EVER FIND OUT.

HERE'S A COPY OF THE PROOF. GO AHEAD-- TAKE IT! C'MON, TOUGH GUY. IT'S YOURS.

VITO STANDS FROZEN.

FINE. HAVE IT YOUR WAY.

NOW, LET'S DISCUSS ANOTHER LITTLE MATTER. JASON WYNN. HOW ARE YOU CONNECTED TO HIM? HE HASN'T MADE YOU ONE OF HIS GUINEA PIGS TOO, HAS HE?

YOU GO TO HELL!

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING AGAIN!

UNGGK!

CRUNCH!

THEN I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO BEAT IT OUT OF YOUR BOY HERE.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, TREMOR?

SPAWN...?!

STOP IT.

HOLY...!

OKAY, CREEP! YOUR TURN.

LIKE HE SAID, GO TO HELL.

SENSING SPAWN'S ANGER, THE COSTUME REACTS. THE BONES SNAP EASILY.

CRUNCH!

I SAID STOP!

THAT'S MY BROTHER, DAMN YOU! YOU SAID YOU'D HELP ME FIND HIM, NOT KILL HIM!

WRONG. I SAID I'D HELP PROTECT YOU FROM VITO AND HIS MEN.

WHEN I SEE SOMEONE STANDING OVER A BLOODY BODY IT'S PRETTY EASY TO DETERMINE WHO THE BAD GUY IS. SO I'M KEEPING MY END OF THE BARGAIN.

CRUNCH!

IF YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH MY METHODS, THEN DON'T ASK FOR HELP NEXT TIME.

BESIDES, HE'LL LIVE IF HE GETS HELP SOON. I ONLY CRIPPLED ONE LEG.

TREMOR, GRAB YOUR BROTHER AND LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I'VE DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE FOR ONE NIGHT.

HE'S ONE OF *US*. ALWAYS HAS BEEN, ALWAYS *WILL*. PEOPLE LIKE HIM DON'T CHANGE. KILLING'S IN HIS *BLOOD*-- THAT'S WHY I'VE KEPT HIM AROUND.

I'LL *KILL* YOU...!!

WHAT... DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING TO REHABILITATE HIM?

NO. WE DON'T HAVE TIME, NOT IF YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR BROTHER.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU CAN'T JUST WALK OUT ON ME! I'VE GOT A FRIGGIN' *ARMY* OUTSIDE! YOU'LL BE DEAD BEFORE YOU GET *TEN FEET*! *NO ONE* SCREWS WITH VITO GRAVANO!

NO ONE!

SAVE YOUR BREATH, FAT BOY. NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU. GO LOOK.

CHRIST.

OH-- AND, uh, VITO...

"... DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE. I'LL BE BACK. REAL SOON.

"YOU AND I ARE FAR FROM BEING THROUGH."

ISSUE 48

AT EIGHTEEN FEET, THE OFFICE CEILINGS ARE IMPRESSIVE, GIVING THE ROOM AN IMMENSE **DEPTH**. THE WALL PANELS ARE IMPORTED CHERRY-WOOD; BEHIND THEM, BANKS OF RETRIEVAL, SURVEILLANCE AND SECURITY SYSTEMS. FEATURED IN THE DECOR ARE STATUARY AND FURNITURE OF A PATRICIAN, VAGUELY **CONDESCENDING** STYLE, LAID UPON LUSH ORIENTAL CARPETING.

VERY FEW OFFICES CAN MATCH IT. BEING A CLOSE CONFIDANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND OTHER WORLD LEADERS DOES CARRY FRINGE BENEFITS. UNLIKE OTHER GOVERNMENTAL OFFICES BUILT TO THE SAME SPECIFICATIONS, THIS ONE BELIES ITS PURPOSE. RATHER THAN GIVING A SENSE OF HIGH PRESENCE AND ELEGANCE, THE LIGHTING HAS BEEN MODIFIED TO ILLUMINATE ONLY THE **NECESSITIES**. DEPENDING ON THE TIME OF DAY, IT APPEARS ALMOST AS A CANDLE-LIT FUNERAL PARLOR... OR AT NIGHT, A **BLACK HOLE**.

C.I.A. SECURITY HEAD JASON WYNN **LIKES** IT THAT WAY.

WE'VE PUT THE PROPER DOCUMENTS TOGETHER, ALONG WITH DENIABLY SUBSTANCIATED EVIDENCE. EVERYTHING TIES INTO A COHESIVE PRESENTATION THAT SHOULD CONVINCE THE RECIPIENTS THAT IT'S *ALL* FACTUAL.

WE PLAN ON MAKING THE DROP LATER TODAY.

EXCELLENT.

AND OUR OTHER INTERESTS...?

THE *GUATEMALAN* EMBASSY IS PREPARED TO HONOR YOUR REQUESTS. GENERAL HORTAS AND HIS STAFF ARE IN LINE WITH YOUR POSITION TO DEFY THE DEPOSED, TERRORIST LEADER. ADDITIONALLY, IN LIGHT OF THEIR PAST ENCOUNTERS WITH HIM, THE GENERAL HAS MADE READY *EXTRA* AIR SUPPORT FOR YOUR AGENTS.

IN *FRANCE*, SEVERAL OUTPOSTS OF THE RADICAL *"PEOPLE FOR A NEW MONARCHY"* HAVE BEEN...

THE LAUNDRY LIST OF RECENT U.S. INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES CONTINUES FOR ANOTHER HOUR.

"I DON'T WANT THEM TO KNOW WHAT DIRECTION YOU'RE COMING FROM."

HEY! WATCH WHERE YOU'RE GOING!

TEN HOURS LATER, ON MANHATTAN'S LOWER EAST SIDE...

UM... SORRY ABOUT THAT, TWITCH. I SHOULD HAVE WARNED YOU. SOME OF THE *SUPPLIES* CAME IN EARLY YESTERDAY AND I DIDN'T WANT THEM JUST LYING AROUND.

BOINK

SO I JUST *STUFFED* EVERYTHING IN THERE.

SO I SEE.

SO ANYWAYS, THIS IS WHERE OUR *SECRETARY* WILL SIT, ONCE WE'RE BUSY ENOUGH TO AFFORD ONE.

IN THE MEANTIME, I THOUGHT WE COULD JUST PUT A DESK AND A FEW FILE CABINETS OUT HERE AND TELL OUR CLIENTS SHE'S ON AN EXTENDED *LUNCH BREAK*.

EXPLAIN TO ME *AGAIN*, SIR, WHY YOU HAD TO DECIDE ON THIS SPACE SO QUICKLY?

THE REALTOR SAID SHE HAD OTHER BITES. IT WAS GOING TO GO *FAST!*

I'M SURE.

COME ON! I WANT TO SHOW YOU OUR OFFICE.

OH MY GOD! TWITCH!!

WHAT IS IT, SIR?!

THEY FIXED IT!

THAT WINDOW WAS BROKEN THE FIRST TIME I SAW THIS PLACE. BUT I TOLD THE LANDLORD IF HE DIDN'T TAKE CARE OF THAT, THERE WAS NO WAY I WAS GOING TO SIGN THE FIVE-YEAR LEASE.

FIVE YEARS!!?

YEAH. ISN'T IT GREAT? AND I HAVEN'T SHOWN YOU THE BEST PART...

...TAKE A GANDER AT THIS!

Whew! IT JUST TAKES MY BREATH AWAY EVERY TIME I LOOK OUT.

SO? WHADDAYA THINK?

VERY IMPRESSIVE WATER TOWERS, SIR.

AND THOSE HUGE CIGARETTE BILLBOARDS BLOCKING 80% OF OUR VIEW-- THOSE ARE QUITE SPECIAL, TOO.

I GOT THEM TO THROW IN THIS CORNER SPACE FOR ONLY 20% MORE THAN THE OTHER UNITS.

SHREWD, VERY SHREWD NEGOTIATING, I MUST SAY.

SPAK!

Ow!

I WAS AMAZED WHEN YOU SAID YOU FOUND A QUIET SPOT FOR US. SEEING AS NO ONE ELSE IS RENTING ON THIS FLOOR, I'LL CREDIT OUR GOOD FORTUNE TO YOUR UNIQUE STANDARDS.

THANKS, TWITCH. I APPRECIATE THAT.

THE LULL OF THE MOMENT ENDS ABRUPTLY. BOTH DETECTIVES TURN INSTINCTIVELY, ALERTED BY A HUSHED SCRATCHING.

THE PACKET STOPS A FEW FEET INSIDE THE OFFICE.

YOU SAID THERE WASN'T ANYONE ON THIS FLOOR.

THERE ISN'T.

THEN YOU COVER ME. I'M CHECKING THIS OUT.

THEY TARGET-SWEEP THE ENTIRE LEVEL.

NOTHING!

CRIPES! WHO THE HELL KNEW WE'D BE HERE?

I DON'T HAVE THAT ANSWER, SIR.

BUT IT APPEARS SOMEBODY HAS A GRUDGE AGAINST THE MEN IN CHIEF BANKS' CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WHO WE TRIED TO EXPOSE.* EVERY ONE WHO WAS CLEARED OF INVOLVEMENT IS HERE.

*ISSUE 43 -- Tom.

WITH NEW INFORMATION ON THEIR CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES.

SO WE'VE GOT A RAT IN OUR MIDST.

IT APPEARS SO. BUT A FEW NEW PIECES HAVE ALSO BEEN ADDED.

YEAH! I HEARD THAT, TOO.

THINKS HE CAN KEEP COMING AND GOING LIKE HE'S SOME BIG SHOT!

Keep out

HEY BOBBY! WHAT DO YOU *KNOW* ABOUT YOUR SO-CALLED PAL?

WE DON'T NEED THAT. NOT HIM OR HIS TROUBLES!

GIVE IT A *REST*, JODY. ARE YOU STUPID, MAN?! YOU *AIN'T* GONNA STOP SPAWN. SO GET *OFF* IT. THE DUDE'S SOME KINDA *FREAK*.

YOU'VE *SEEN* WHAT HE CAN DO. MY CONCERN AIN'T ABOUT HIM BEING IN OUR ALLEYS. I JUST WISH HE'D STOP *ROAMING* SO MUCH...

...THEN I'D BE ABLE TO GO WHERE HE *WASN'T*.

NOTHING. I-- I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HE'D RETURNED.

WHAT?! YOU MEAN TO TELL ME HE HASN'T SAID *NOTHIN'* TO YOU? WHAT KINDA FRIEND IS *THAT*?

WHY DON'T YOU AND BOOTSY SMELL THE *COFFEE*. HE DON'T GIVE A *CRAP* ABOUT YOU.

SEE, WHERE *I* COME FROM, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A ***PART-TIME*** PAL. YOU LET PEOPLE YOU LIKE KNOW YOU'RE IN TOWN.

EXCEPT YOU'RE OVER-LOOKING SOMETHING FELLAS, AL ISN'T LIKE THE ***REST*** OF US. SO HE DON'T HAVE TO ACT OR DO ANYTHING THAT MAKES SENSE TO US.

RIGHT, BOOTSY! AL'S EARNED WHATEVER LIFESTYLE HE WANTS. IT SEEMS A FEW OF US HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT WE WERE LIKE WHEN WE FIRST ARRIVED.

OH, ***PLEASE!*** CAN THE SARCASM, BOBBY. YOU WHAT TO BE SUCKED INTO HIS CHARADE... GOD ***BLESS*** YOU!

TO BOBBY AND BOOTSY! WHIPPING BOYS TO *AL*, THE ***KING OF BLOOD.***

BELCH

HA HA HA HA HAA

HERE! HERE!

I'LL DRINK TO THAT...

IT GOES ESSENTIALLY UNNOTICED, THE POUNDING.

LOST AMONGST THE COUNTLESS OTHER SOUNDS.

BAM BAM

KRAK BAM

THOSE WHO ACKNOWLEDGE IT ARE AWARE OF WHERE IT COMES FROM:

KRISH BAM

BAM BAM

RAT CITY.

BAM BAM

SCRAAPE BAM

THE ALLEY'S DEEPEST REACHES.

CRUNK

BAM BAM BAM

SKREEK

A PLACE EVEN THE HARD-CASE SOCIOPATHS FEAR.

A PLACE WHERE DARK SOULS ATTEMPT TO VANISH.

NONE ENTIRELY SUCCESSFULLY.

SPAWN!

AL!

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO YOURSELF? CONTINUING TO PLAY INTO THE DEVIL'S HANDS. OR MAYBE IT'S NOT ***YOU.*** MAYBE THE ***COSTUME*** HAS FINALLY TAKEN TOTAL CONTROL.

THE COSTUME HAS NOTHING TO **DO** WITH THIS.

OH, REALLY?

YES!

SO YOU'RE PURPOSELY BUILDING THIS PRISON ON YOUR OWN.

TRYING TO ISOLATE YOURSELF FROM OTHERS. HIDE FROM LIFE'S REALITIES.

YEAH, THAT'S IT. BUT NOW YOU KNOW WHERE I'M AT. SO I GUESS I'VE FAILED.

YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT.

THEN TELL ME ABOUT IT!!

GKK=

OTHERWISE, GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

WH-WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

I'M GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF YOU. POPPING UP WHENEVER YOU FEEL LIKE IT... PREACHING YOUR GODDAMN MYSTERIES...!

YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO ME, THEN SAY IT!!

BECAUSE I'M TOO EASY A TARGET. TREMOR. OVERKILL. THE CURSE. EVERYONE SEEMS TO KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME. WELL, NOT ANY MORE!

FROM NOW ON, I DON'T EXIST.

YES YOU DO. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO WON'T ACCEPT THAT.

QUEENS. THE NEXT EVENING..

WHAT WAS I THINKING? TELLING THEM I'D HELP REORGANIZE THE BOOKS FOR THE AUDITORS.

BUT, *NOOO!* I'M NOT CONTENT TO JUST MAKE SURE ALL PAPERWORK FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOSPITAL'S NEW CHILDREN'S WING GETS DONE.

NOPE. THAT ALL-CONSUMING TASK WASN'T ENOUGH. I NEEDED MORE. AND SARAH EVEN TRIED TO TALK ME OUT OF IT--TWICE.

I SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO HER.

ALL THIS FINANCIAL STUFF IS STARTING TO LOOK THE SAME. MAYBE I SHOULD CALL...

OH, NO!

THAT'S *IT.* I GIVE UP!

I SWEAR I DON'T KNOW HOW TERRY DOES IT.

REQUISITIONS. LOAN COLATERALIZATION. BACKGROUND CHECKS. AT LEAST HIS ARE FOR SECURITY REASONS. *OURS* ARE FOR CHARITY DONATIONS...!

C.I.A. HEADQUARTERS, MANHATTAN.

AGENT TERRY FITZGERALD WAITS FOR HIS GLOBAL SEARCH TO LOCATE THE REQUESTED DATA.

IF ALL GOES WELL, HE'LL NOW HAVE ACCESS TO FILES THAT HAVE BEEN RE-ROUTED AND ENCODED TO NESTLE QUIETLY IN OBSCURE SUB-DIRECTORIES.

A LOOP HAD BEEN SET UP TO DIVERT ANY INQUIRIES INTO ANOTHER, SIMILAR, LOCATION.

TERRY'S HOPING THAT HIS ENDLESS OVERTIME HOURS WILL FINALLY BEAR FRUIT.

C'MON, BABY. DON'T CRASH ON ME NOW.

MY GOD.

IT *IS* WYNN! I KNEW IT! THE INCONSISTENCIES IN A FEW ARMAMENT SHIPMENTS LEAD BACK HERE ...TO *HIM*.

PERFECT! I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK I'D NEVER SORT THROUGH HIS DEFENSES.

NOW I JUST HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO NAIL HIS ASS TO THE WALL. BUT WITH THE...

?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

HE RUBS HIS EYES REPEATEDLY. AFTER A MINUTE THE BLURRING CLEARS UP.

FOR WEEKS NOW, TERRY HAS BEEN IGNORING HIS BODY'S SIGNS THAT SOMETHING MAY BE WRONG. HE'S BEEN ABLE TO RATIONALIZE ALL OF IT AWAY.

EVEN NOW HE TELLS HIMSELF THAT THE COMPUTER MONITOR IS PUTTING A STRAIN ON HIS EYES-- NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS. HE'S BEEN OBSESSED WITH TRYING TO PROVE THAT HIS BOSS IS INVOLVED IN TREASONOUS EXTRA-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES.

IN THE PROCESS, HIS PRIORITIES HAVE BEEN DRIFTING AWAY FROM HIS OWN BEST INTERESTS.

HE'LL COME TO REGRET THAT.

JULIA, COULD I GET YOU TO DO ME A FAVOR?

SURE. WHAT DO YOU NEED?

CAN YOU FILE THIS STACK AWAY? I THINK I'VE FOUND WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR.

I HOPE IT'S SOMETHING THAT'LL HELP US BOTH OUT. RIGHT, TERRY?

UM... YES, SIR.

SO WHAT *EXACTLY* HAVE YOU PIECED TOGETHER...? MORE INFORMATION ON SPAWN, I HOPE. THE PRESIDENT'S AIDES HAVE BEEN HUNGRY FOR SOME CONCRETE ANSWERS TO HIS RECENT TERRORIST ATTACK.*

*ISSUE#36 -- TOM.

THEY SEEM TO BELIEVE HE'S WORKING IN CONNECTION WITH SOME FOREIGN MILITIA.

A FEW MORE DETAILS SHOULD SATISFY THEM, DON'T YOU THINK.

YES, SIR.

I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE BEEN QUITE AGGRESSIVE TRYING TO SORT THROUGH THIS MESS.

I WANT TO BE ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE BEFORE YOU GET MY FINAL REPORTS.

EXCELLENT. I'LL BE ANXIOUS TO READ THEM.

THEY'LL BE ON YOUR DESK AS SOON AS I'M SURE.

CAN YOU HOLD MY CALLS FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, JULIA.

YOU BET. WHAT ABOUT WANDA?

I'LL TAKE HERS.

GOT IT.

THAT WAS *TOO* CLOSE. IF WYNN WAS TO EVER FIND OUT I'VE BEEN DIGGING INTO HIS ACTIVITIES, I DON'T WANT TO *THINK* WHAT HE'S CAPABLE OF. IF I'M RIGHT, HE'S ALSO THE ONE WHO SET ME UP, MAKING EVERY-ONE THINK I WAS SOME KIND OF *MURDERER**... WHICH MEANS HE'S CONNECTED TO EVERY LEGAL AND ILLEGAL AGENCY IN THIS COUNTRY. IF I'M NOT CAREFUL...

*HEART RACING, TERRY WAKES FOUR MINUTES LATER. THIS TIME HE'S SCARED. WHY WOULD HE HAVE A BLACK-OUT, HE WONDERS.

AND THE BLURRED VISION?

SOMETHING IS TERRIBLY WRONG.

*ISSUES 20-24 -- TOM.

WITH A SHAKY QUICKNESS, HE CLEANS THE MESS AROUND HIS DESK, THEN LEAVES, TELLING NO ONE WHAT JUST HAPPENED

HE MENTIONS NOTHING TO WANDA. SHE'S ALREADY BEEN HARPING ON HIM TO CHECK WITH THE DOCTOR ABOUT HIS RECENT COUGHING FITS.

WITH ALL THE PRESSURE THAT'S BEEN IN THEIR LIVES OF LATE, HE DOESN'T WANT TO SCARE HER.

FOR HIMSELF, IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE.

Gasp!
Gasp!
Gasp!
Gasp!
ARE YOU GOING TO LIVE, SIR?
JUST GIVE ME A Gasp! SECOND TO CATCH MY BREATH. Hee-Hee! I CAN'T BELIEVE THE ELEVATOR WOULD DO THIS.
I DON'T BELIEVE YOUR EFFORTS TO PRY THE DOORS OPEN WOULD TRIGGER A HEART ATTACK.
THE GYM. I'VE GOT TO GET BACK. I'LL BE WITH YOU IN ANOTHER TEN SECONDS.
DON'T STRAIN YOUR-SELF.
EVENTUALLY THE DOORS ARE WORKED OPEN. BY THEN, DETECTIVES BURKE AND TWITCH ARE DEVOID OF ANY HUMOR.
WE DID IT!!
I'LL PHONE THE SUPER-INTENDANT TOMORROW MORNING. AND IF THIS ISN'T FIXED IN TWO DAYS, I'M DEDUCTING A MONTH'S RENT.

FIND OUT ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT FILE, TWITCH?

NOT REALLY. THE DATA SEEMS TO BE COMPLETELY ACCURATE.

AND I'M ASSUMING THE NEW INFORMATION IS RELIABLE, ALSO.

SO WHAT NOW? DO WE MEET HIM LIKE HIS NOTE SAID?

IT DOESN'T APPEAR WE HAVE ANY CHOICE.

WELL, WE'VE GOT TWO DAYS BEFORE THE MEETING. WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND *SOMETHING*.

THOUGH IT STILL BUGS ME HOW HE KNEW WHERE WE'D BE, AND HAD ENOUGH FORESIGHT TO WRITE UP A LETTER. HOW'D HE KNOW THE TELEPHONE LINES HADN'T BEEN INSTALLED?

WHOEVER THIS MYSTERY MAN IS, HE'S VERY FAMILIAR WITH US. I WONDER WHY?

FRAGILE

CHOMP WE'LL FIGURE IT OUT. TOMORROW THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO DELIVER THE REST OF THE FURNITURE. GULP THEN WE CAN GET DOWN TO SOME REAL NITTY GRITTY. SLURP!

WHY DON'T YOU SIT DOWN AND EAT, TWITCH?

I'VE LOST MY APPETITE SOMEHOW, SIR. I'LL EAT LATER.

SUIT YOURSELF.

UNBELIEVABLE.

EXTRA GARLIC JACK CHEESE

TUNA

BUTTER MILK

HEY, WHADDYA THINK OF THE NEW 'FRIDGE? IT JUST CAME IN THIS MORNING.

IT'S BEEN GOING ON FOR OVER TWENTY MINUTES. AT FIRST THEY CRAWL IN EVERY DIRECTION, CANVASSING AS MUCH OF THE SYMBIOTE'S BEING AS POSSIBLE.

THEN, WHEN THEIR "AURA OF EVIL" HAS BEEN PASSED ON TO THE OUTER SHELL OF THE HELLSPAWN, THEY SLITHER UP TO THE BEING'S HIGHEST POINT.

THEY ARE THE **WORMS.** THE CARRIERS. GOD'S CREATURES, EVOLVED NOW... **SPECIALIZED**... TO ABSORB THE SINS OF THE LIVING AND TRANSFER THEM TO THE UNDEAD.

THOUGH HE FIGHTS IT, AL SIMMONS IS A **SLAVE** TO THIS NEW RITUAL. INTELLECTUALLY, HE IS AWARE OF THE PROCESS, BUT HE CANNOT PHYSICALLY **CONTROL** ANY OF IT.

THE SYMBIOTE MUST FEED **ITSELF.**

FORTUNATELY, IT WON'T MATTER. THE CEREMONY WILL CONCLUDE IN ANOTHER FEW MINUTES.

ELSEWHERE.

HEY!?

WHO *BUILT* THIS FRIGGIN' BON-FIRE? IT BARELY WARMS MY NOSE. MAN, AIN'T hic *NO ONE* GOT ANY CAMPING SKILLS AROUND HERE? BURRP!

DO IT *YOURSELF* NEXT TIME, THEN.

YEAH, BOBBY. INSTEAD OF GET-TING PLASTERED, WHY DON'T YA DO SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE, LIKE PUT ANOTHER PIECE'A WOOD ON?

HGHK!

YOU'RE DRUNK, ORVILLE.

WELL, SO ARE *YOU!* GASP!

YOU'RE RIGHT. BURP...! OH, THAT TASTED GOOD. NOW THAT YOU'VE REMINDED ME, IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE OL' BLADDER GLADDER.

BEING SOME-WHAT MODEST, BOBBY SEARCHES FOR A BIT OF A PRIVATE SPOT TO DO HIS BUSINESS.

GOD, I'M GONNA BURST.

Tinkle Tinkle SPLASH

Uh?

WE HAVE TO TALK.

THE IMAGE SOBERS BOBBY INSTANTLY.

JEE-ZUS, AL! I THINK I CRAPPED MYSELF. WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I NEED A FAVOR. SOMETHING'S HAPPENING TO ME, AND I CAN'T STOP IT, SO I HAVE TO DISAPPEAR FOR A WHILE. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG. I NEED YOU TO TELL THE OTHERS I'VE LEFT.

UM...THANKS, I GUESS. ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?

BUT I'LL STILL BE AROUND. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO NEEDS TO KNOW THAT.

NO, THIS IS MY PROBLEM. YOU'VE DEALT WITH ENOUGH OF MY FALL-OUT.

WHERE WILL YOU BE?

I CAN'T TELL YOU. AT LEAST NOT NOW. YOU'RE SAFER NOT KNOWING.

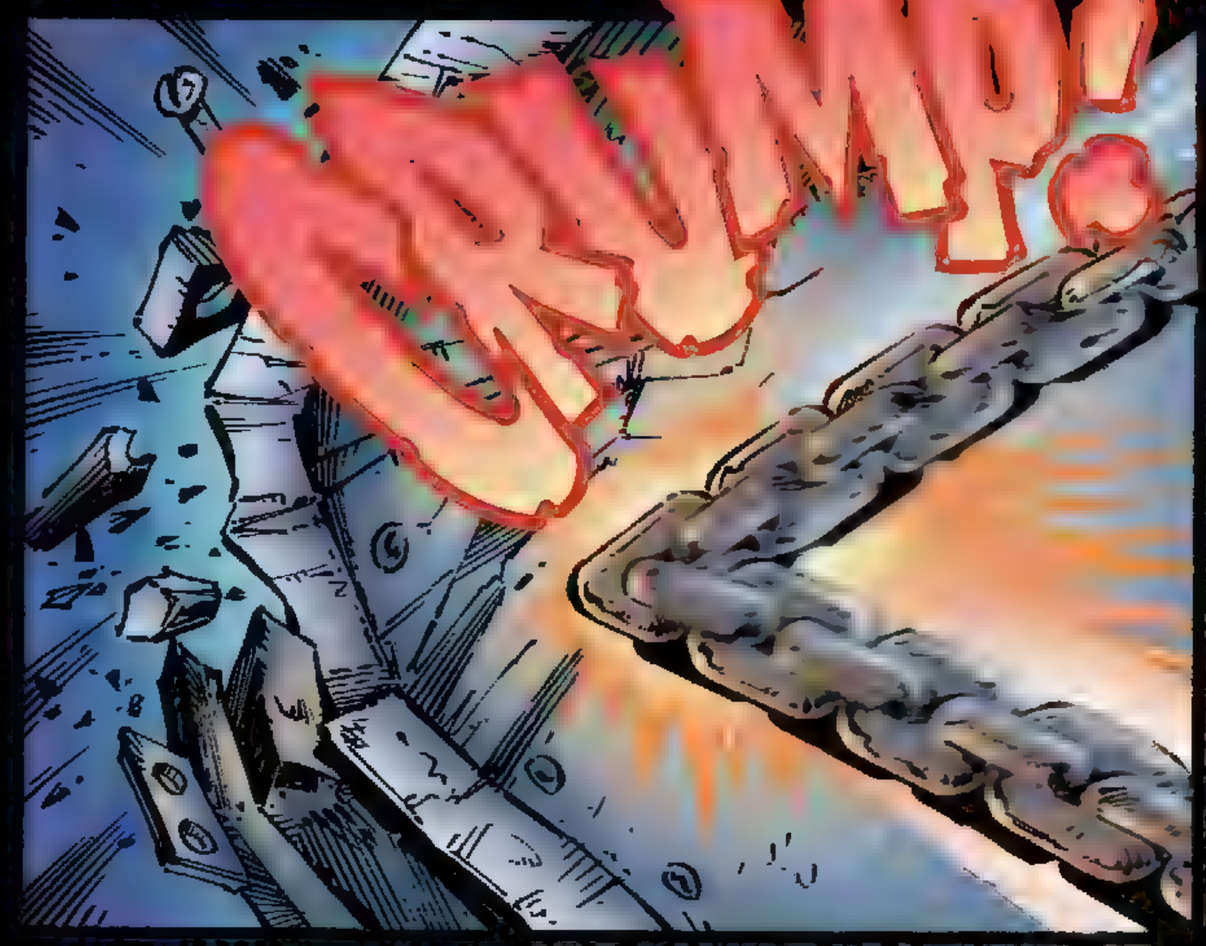
MY EXISTENCE SEEMS TO ATTRACT THINGS. UGLY THINGS. I'VE BECOME SOME DAMN MAGNET OF MISERY-- WHICH WOULD BE FINE IF IT DIDN'T SPILL OVER, BUT I CAN'T CONTROL THAT. SO I HAVE TO HIDE.

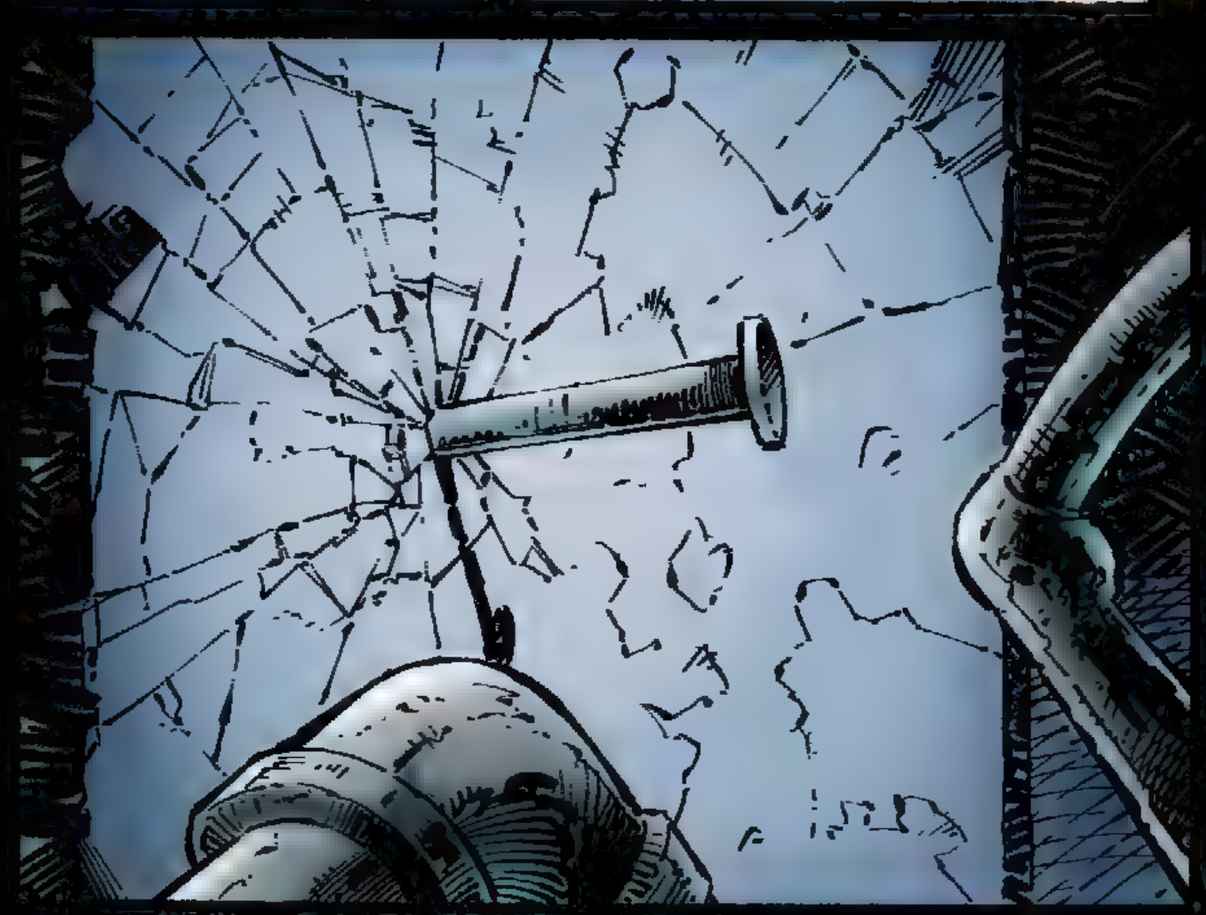
EVEN FROM YOU.

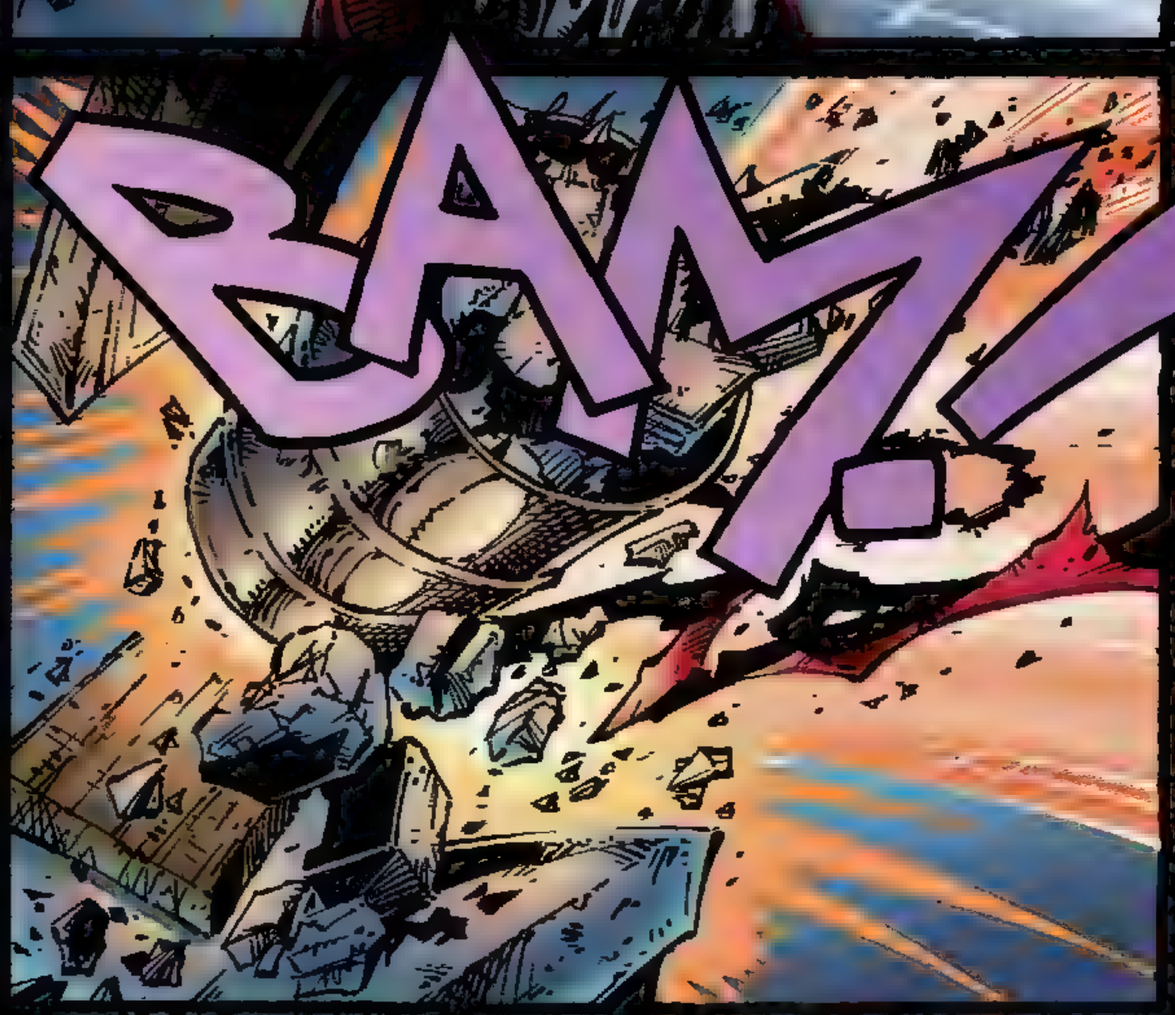
SEE, I WON'T LET YOU DIE A SECOND TIME.*

GOOD-BYE, MY FRIEND. I HAVE WORK TO DO.

* ISSUE #20--Tom.







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WE EXPECT THE REQUESTED MEETING TO BE CONFIRMED WITHIN 48 HOURS. THE AREA WILL BE PROPERLY SECURED, AND OUR SURVEILLANCE TEAMS ARE ALREADY IN PLACE.

ADDITIONALLY, I'VE ESTABLISHED THAT ALL PARTIES INVOLVED ARE TO MAINTAIN A DISTANCE PRIOR TO THE MEETING SO AS NOT TO BRING ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES.

BEFORE I IMPLIMENT THESE ANY FURTHER, DO YOU REQUIRE ANY FURTHER ASSIGNMENTS BE DEVELOPED?

NO, THANK YOU.

VERY GOOD, SIR.

ALL I NEED IN BRINGING ABOUT THE DEMISE OF OUR TWO FRIENDS IS *RIGHT HERE.*

I'M TELLING YOU, JASON, THERE AIN'T *NOTHING* LIKE A GOOD *WITCH-HUNT.*

KNOCK KNOCK

GRANNIE? MAY I COME IN?

OF COURSE, AL, ANYTIME.

AND YOU DON'T NEED TO KNOCK, YOU'RE ALWAYS WELCOME HERE.

TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I'D LIKE IT IF YOU VISITED MORE OFTEN. I HOPE THAT DOESN'T SOUND SELFISH.

NO, IT DOESN'T.

I'M SORRY IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE MY LAST VISIT.* I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PUT A FEW THINGS IN ORDER... WHICH IS WHY I'M HERE, ACTUALLY.

*ISSUE 38 -- Tom.

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING TO ME. AND I CAN'T SEEM TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. THINGS... THINGS YOU CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE ARE SPINNING OUT OF CONTROL.

AND I CAN'T STOP IT.

NOW YOU ***LISTEN*** TO ME, BOY. THE LORD BURDENS ***ALL*** OF US WITH OUR OWN PERSONAL CROSSES. SOME WILL SEEM A LITTLE HEAVIER THAN OTHERS, BUT GOD KNOWS HOW MUCH EACH OF US CAN BEAR.

I TOLD YOU BEFORE, AL. HE PICKED ***YOU*** TO BE ONE OF HIS ANGELS FOR A ***REASON***. IT'S JUST THAT NONE OF US, NOT EVEN YOU WHO LIVE WITH HIM IN HEAVEN, WILL EVER UNDERSTAND THE MYSTERIES OF HIS WAYS.

OUR PART IS JUST HAVING FAITH. GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF THE REST.

IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. AT LEAST NOT NOW. WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME IS PUTTING **OTHERS** IN DANGER. INCLUDING YOU.

WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?

I DON'T KNOW IF IT'S **SAFE** FOR ME TO KEEP VISITING YOU.

NO! DON'T YOU ***DARE*** DO THAT TO ME!

I MAY BE OLD BUT I'M NOT STUPID. I'VE SENSED SOMETHING HAS BEEN GNAWING AWAY AT YOU FOR QUITE SOME TIME. BUT YOU DON'T RUN AWAY FROM THAT.

YOU NEVER RAN WHEN YOU WERE ALIVE, SO DON'T START NOW. THIS FEELING, THIS PREMONITION OF DOOM-- ***CAST IT ASIDE***. DON'T ABANDON THOSE WHO CAN HELP YOU.

WE ALL ***LOVE*** YOU TOO MUCH.

I HAVE TO LEAVE. I'M SORRY.

IT'S YOUR ***INNER DEMONS***, ISN'T IT? YOU MUST ***CONQUER*** THEM, AL, WITH THE ***LORD'S*** HELP, IF YOU EVER WANT TO FIND ***TRUE*** PEACE.

Hmmm...

N-hnnn...

OPEN WIDE...

Nnnn...

THAT'S ALL. YOU CAN GET DRESSED NOW.

IT APPEARS THAT EVERYTHING IS IN GOOD WORKING ORDER. I JUST WISH WE DIDN'T HAVE TO DRAG YOU IN HERE EVERY TIME.

WHY?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?

BUT JUST TO MAKE ***SURE***, I'M SENDING YOU TO A ***SPECIALIST***. HE'S A DOCTOR WHO DEALS WITH ***NEUROLOGICAL*** SYMPTOMS.

NOTHING, I HOPE... BUT YOUR FAINTING SPELL TELLS ME THAT SOMETHING WENT WRONG. *

I JUST LIKE TO BE CERTAIN I HAVEN'T OVERLOOKED ANYTHING.

* LAST ISSUE -- Tom.

Oh, NOW DON'T LOOK SO WORRIED.

THE DOCTOR WILL JUST RUN A FEW ***TESTS***, POSSIBLY A C.T. SCAN, JUST TO EASE ***ALL*** OUR MINDS. I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN UNDER A GREAT DEAL OF PRESSURE LATELY... ON ***TOP*** OF THAT NASTY COUGH YOU'VE HAD... BUT US MEDICAL GEEKS LIKE TO KNOW WHY PEOPLE BLACK OUT FOR NO REASON.

IT HAPPENS TO MOST PEOPLE AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIVES. WE JUST NEVER KNOW ***WHY***.

WHAT CAN I SAY? WE'RE A CURIOUS LOT. SO I'LL SCHEDULE AN APPOINT-MENT...?

Uh... YEAH, SURE. IF YOU THINK IT'S BEST.

COFF

COFF

OUT IN THE PARKING LOT, TERRY'S CHEST BEGINS TO TIGHTEN AS HIS MIND SWIRLS WITH FABRICATED IMAGES AND THOUGHTS.

IT TRIGGERS A SLIGHT COUGHING FIT.

HE CURSES HIMSELF FOR NOT DOING SOMETHING EARLIER.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

GODDAMMIT! WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?

THIS MADNESS. I THOUGHT I'D GET AWAY FROM IT, NOT HAVE IT FOLLOW ME. NOT HERE!

NOT IN RAT CITY.

I WANTED TO BE SAFE.

BUT I CAN'T. I'LL NEVER BE FREE, NOW.

NEVER.

IT'S ME. I'M THE ONE. IT LIVES IN ME.

WANTING TO KILL. TO HURT EVERYONE. JUST SO I'LL LEARN TO BE LIKE IT.

LEARN TO HATE EVERYTHING.

AL, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOURSELF?

BUT IT WAS BORN IN HELL, MY COSTUME. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO FIGHT THAT.

IT'S TOO STRONG. I CAN'T DO IT.

NOT ANYMORE.

I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING LEFT. THEY'VE STOLEN IT ALL.

SO DO YOUR WORST.

A PRISON. HE'S BUILT HIS OWN PERSONAL ASYLUM.

HE WOULDN'T DO THAT.

I'M TIRED OF FIGHTING. IT'S ALL I'VE DONE MY WHOLE LIFE.

AND LOOK WHAT I'VE GOT. NOTHING AND NO ONE.

THE COSTUME'S GOT SOME KIND OF *INFECTION*-- MAKING IT *ERRATIC*. AL DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO READ THE SYMPTOMS. AND IF HE DOESN'T STOP IT FROM SPREADING, THE SYBIOTE WILL ADVANCE TO *NECRO-STATE NINE* BEFORE IT'S *READY* FOR THAT LEVEL.

AL!

HELP ME! *WHERE'S THE OPENING?*

GOT TO GET IN. DON'T HAVE TIME TO WAIT.

I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW THE OLD MAN GOT IN.

BUT HE DID.

MY GOD, AL...

NO.

IN ANOTHER OF THE CITY'S MILLION SHADOWS...

WHAT A SAP. WHAT A MAROON.

IF JASON WYNN IS THE BEST EXAMPLE OF "DESPICABLE" THESE HUMANS CAN MUSTER...

...THEN I COULD BE KING OF THIS PLANET TOMORROW.

HE'S GOT THE EVILNESS, I'LL GIVE HIM THAT, BUT I'M ABLE TO KNEAD HIM JUST TOO EASILY INTO WHATEVER I WANT.

HERO. SCAPEGOAT. ASSASSIN. POLITICIAN. I'VE MADE HIM PLAY 'EM ALL. HE DOESN'T EVEN RESIST MUCH... UNLIKE YOU, MY DEAR FURRY FRIEND.

AT LEAST *YOU* PUT UP A *FIGHT* FOR...

?

IT TAKES A FULL THIRTY SECONDS FOR THE SIGNAL TO PENETRATE.

YES!

YES. YES. YES.

THIS IS *PERFECT!* SIMMONS IS GETTING *CRAPPED* ON BY HIS SYMBIOTE. I ALWAYS DID LOVE THOSE K-MODEL UNITS. THEY'RE ALWAYS SO VOLITILE.

HEE HEE

I MEAN, I KNEW *SOME*THING WAS UP WITH SPAWN AND HIS UNIFORM... BUT *THIS?!* EVEN *I* COULDN'T HAVE PREDICTED IT WOULD HAPPEN *THIS* QUICK!

HEE HEE HOHO!

I'M TELLING YOU, LITTLE FRIEND, THIS COULD SAVE ME A COUPLE *MONTHS* OF GROUNDWORK. JUST THINK-- *NOT* HAVING TO FOOL AROUND WITH WYNN. OR FITZGERALD. OR BLAKE.

JUST STRAIGHT TO THE *MOTHERLODE!* *BAM!* AND SIMMONS HAS A ONE-WAY TICKET BACK TO *HELL.*

I CAN *TASTE* THE VICTORY *NOW*-- *GULP!*

GOD.

HE WAS ALL I COULD THINK OF THEN. AS THE COSTUME THRASHED ABOUT, TRYING TO SPILL MY GUTS ON THE GROUND, IT WAS GOD I THOUGHT OF.

WHY WOULD HE CREATE ALL THIS?

WHY WOULD HE WANT TO?

DAMN YOU, MALEBOLGIA.

MY ANGER AT HIM WAS ALL I HAD LEFT: THE ONLY DISTRACTION BIG ENOUGH TO HELP ME FORGET THE PAIN.

EVEN AS THE TUMORS GREW AND MY GUTS SPILLED FORTH, IT WAS **ANGER** AT HIM THAT POSSESSED ME.

GOD MADE SATAN. SATAN MADE HELL. HELL MADE MALEBOLGIA. MALEBOLGIA MADE THIS COSTUME.

SO IT'S FROM **HIM**. FROM GOD THAT ALL THIS EVIL COMES.

IT'S HIS FAULT.

SOMEHOW, HE WANTED OR NEEDED THIS.

MY LOGIC MADE NO SENSE. IT DIDN'T MATTER. IT SERVED THE PURPOSE UNTIL ANOTHED DISTRACTION APPEARED.

AL! *FIGHT* IT! FIGHT THE *PAIN!*

IT'S FEEDING OFF YOUR *EMOTIONS!*

CAGLIOSTRO.

"THE COUNT." HE CALLS HIMSELF. ALWAYS APPEARS OUT OF NO-WHERE, LIKE SOME FRIGGIN' HOODOO MAN.

HE KNOWS THINGS... STUFF HE SHOULDN'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT. HOW? WHY?

AND HIS EYES. I'LL NEVER FORGET THEM. THEY GLARE WITH A DEFIANCE LIKE I'VE NEVER SEEN.

AT FIRST, IT DIDN'T SEEM TO MATTER WHEN THE CREATURE REACTED, SWALLOWING THE OLD MAN WHOLE.

EVEN WHEN A HUGE, SERPENTINE PIECE OF THE CLOAK SNARED HIM, HE DIDN'T APPEAR SCARED.

IT WAS MORE LIKE HE WAS WAITING FOR IT. SOMEHOW PREPARED FOR WHAT WAS TO HAPPEN.

THE COUNT NEVER FLINCHED. NOT A GODDAMN MUSCLE.

THE MUTATED CLOAK JUST SAT THERE, FROZEN LIKE A GIANT COBRA. I THOUGHT THAT WAS IT.

I DIDN'T NOTICE THE FIRST CONVULSION, BUT EACH ONE AFTER THAT GREW MORE INTENSELY VIOLENT.

ITS THRASHING BECAME A BLUR BEFORE IT ENDED ITS OWN PAIN BY VOMITING UP WHAT WAS POISONING IT:

THE COUNT.

HE ROLLED AROUND A BIT AFTER THE UNHOLY ABORTION, THEN LET FLY A STREAM OF DIALECT NOT FROM THIS PLANET.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT I DON'T REMEMBER, EXCEPT THAT IT FELT AS IF A HERD OF ANIMALS WAS BEING STUFFED INSIDE ME.

HE TOLD ME AFTERWARDS I WAS UNCONSCIOUS FOR ONLY A FEW SECONDS.

THAT WAS GOOD, HE SAID.

COME *ON*, BOY. CAPTURE IT. *CONTROL* IT. HARNESS ITS *POWER*.

YOU *MUST*.

IF ANY OF US ARE GOING TO LIVE THROUGH THIS, YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO *CAGE* THE DEMONS.

MORE RIDDLES. AS THE PAIN PASSED, MY CONFUSION DIDN'T. BUT IT WASN'T THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS.

THAT COULD WAIT. I NEEDED SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT.

HELP ME. PLEASE.

I'VE BEEN TRYING, AL. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? WHY DO YOU THINK I'M HERE?

BECAUSE OF *YOU*.

MY APPEARANCE HERE *ISN'T* AN ACCIDENT. NEITHER IS YOURS.

WE NEED EACH OTHER. SO DO OUR SOULS.

THEY'RE HIDING SOMETHING. I *KNOW* THEY ARE. I CAN SEE IT IN HIS FACE.

DR. ROLLINS
NEUROLOGIST
SUITE 209

IF I'VE GOT A PROBLEM, WHY DON'T THEY JUST SPIT IT OUT? ALL THIS WAITING IS KILLING ME. I'D RATHER HAVE BAD NEWS THAN *NO* NEWS.

mmmHmm

TAP TAP TAP

I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE. THIS IS CRAZY. I'M PERFECTLY FINE.

tic tic tic

THEY SAID THIS HAPPENS TO EVERYONE. SO, I SHOULD JUST GO. THAT'S IT! I'M OUTTA HERE.

WELL, MR. FITZ-GERALD, YOUR CHART APPEARS TO BE IN ORDER. IT LOOKS LIKE DR. BUSINO JUST WANTS ME TO RUN SOME STANDARD TESTS.

NOTHING TO GET EXCITED ABOUT.

I'M DYING. I'M DYING. I'M DYING.

THAT'D BE FINE. WHATEVER YOU NEED, DOCTOR.

PLEASE, MR. FITZ-GERALD. IT'S OKAY TO BE A LITTLE ANXIOUS. MOST PATIENTS ARE THE FIRST TIME. COME, LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT WE'LL BE LOOKING FOR IN YOUR C.T. SCAN.

HERE'S AN X-RAY OF A TYPICAL BRAIN. EACH AREA SERVES A SPECIFIC NEED SUCH AS MOTOR SKILLS. THOUGHT PROCESSES.

WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DETERMINE IS IF THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BE-TWEEN YOUR RECENT BLACKOUT AND THE COLD YOU HAD. SEE SOME VIRUSES TRIGGER CERTAIN CHEMICAL REAC-TIONS IN OUR BODIES.

YOURS MAY HAVE SOMEHOW BLOCKED SOME NERVE IMPULSES FROM DOING THEIR JOB. IT'LL SHOW UP AS A CLOUDY AREA, LIKE THIS.

WE NEED YOUR SCANS TO MAKE ANY SORT OF JUDGMENT. SO, IF YOU'LL FOLLOW ME, THE LAB IS NOW READY FOR YOU.

WE'LL HAVE ALL THE RESULTS BACK IN A FEW DAYS.

A FEW *DAYS?!* I'VE ALREADY LIED TO WANDA ABOUT ALL THIS, HOPING IT'D JUST BLOW OVER.

"NOW I HAVE TO KEEP THIS UP SOME MORE."

Um... NO, I'M SORRY, WANDA, HE'S IN A MEETING. HE SHOULD BE BACK IN A COUPLE HOURS.

I'LL TELL HIM YOU PHONED.

THANKS, JULIA.

THAT'S STRANGE. HE NEVER MENTIONED A MEETING THIS MORNING.

NEW YORK CITY. THE CONCRETE JUNGLE.

WITHIN THE JUNGLE NOW LURKS THE **BEAST.**

HE'S MADE IT. AFTER A JOURNEY OF NEARLY A MONTH, HE NOW SMELLS THE STENCH OF MAN.

BUT IT'S ONE IN PARTICULAR WHOSE BLOOD HE SEEKS.

SIM-ONZ

IT'S BEEN A HELL OF A WEEK FOR TERRY. TWO SECURITY SYSTEMS OVERHAULED. DOZENS OF INTERLACED PHONE CONVERSATIONS. ANXIETY OVER TEST RESULTS.

AND ALL THE WHILE RECONSTRUCTING JASON WYNN'S MURDER CONSPIRACY AGAINST HIM.

THE ONLY THING I STILL CAN'T FIGURE IS WHY HE'D TRANSFER ME TO HIS OFFICE *AFTER* THE WHOLE INCIDENT BLEW OVER. HE CERTAINLY KNOWS I DON'T HAVE ANY POWER OVER HIM.

WELL, *WHATEVER* HE'S PLANNING, IT'S ABOUT TO GET CLIPPED.

I JUST WISH I DIDN'T FEEL SO *TIRED*. NOW'S NOT THE TIME TO FEEL WEAK. I'M ABOUT TO WALK INTO THE MIDDLE OF A MINEFIELD.

THE WORLD BEGINS TO SPIN AS HIS MIND WANDERS. IMAGES DISTORT. HE BLINKS FRANTICALLY, TRYING TO REGAIN HIS FOCUS.

IT ONLY GETS **WORSE.**

THEN IT STOPS.

LEAVING HIM IN TOTAL DARKNESS.

KRONK

KRONK

KRONK

uh...

what?

HE TRIES TO REACT.

TOO LATE.

THEN ALL GOES DARK AGAIN.

CAN YOU BELIEVE OUR *LUCK*, TWITCH?! A BURGERWORLD SO CLOSE TO OUR NEW OFFICE...!

THE GODS ARE DEFINITELY SENDING US A MESSAGE, SIR.

SIR?

Mmmmm... THE 'BELLY BUSTER" WITH EXTRA CHEESE! slurp

AS THE DETECTIVES PREPARE TO LEAVE...

Oh, no.

BANG!

COVER ME, SIR, I THINK IT CAME FROM THE BUILDING FRONT.

WHOA! EASY, BOY! PUT THAT GUN AWAY, NOW. IT'S JUST THE CAR--IT BLEW A ROD OR SOMETHING.

YOU'VE BEEN EDGY LATELY. WHAT'S UP?

I DON'T KNOW. MAYBE IT'S THAT FILE SOMEONE DROPPED OFF. I KEEP THINKING WE'RE BEING WATCHED. JESUS, WHAT DO WE DO NOW? YOU'VE ALREADY SPENT ALL YOUR MONEY ON THE OFFICE.

NOT *ALL* OF IT. I'VE GOT A LITTLE *SURPRISE* COMING.

BRING

BRING

BRING

HELLO?

THIS IS SGT. FRITSCH OF THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE, MA'AM. ARE YOU WANDA BLAKE, TERRY FITZGERALD'S WIFE?

YES. WHY? WHAT'S WRONG?

I'M SORRY, MA'AM, BUT YOUR HUSBAND'S BEEN IN AN ACCIDENT. IT'S PRETTY BAD.

HE WAS RUSHED TO St. LUKE'S HOSPITAL ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. YOU MAY WANT TO...

HELLO?

HELLO? MA'AM?

CLUNK

clatter

ISSUE 50

AT FIRST, HE THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A SIMPLE **COLD**. SOON IT DEVELOPED INTO SEVERE **HACKING**. NEITHER SEEMED OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

WHY WOULD THEY?

THEN CAME **DIZZINESS**, FOLLOWED BY A **FAINTING SPELL**. THAT'S WHEN HE STARTED TO GET ANXIOUS.

HIS FAMILY DOCTOR SENT HIM TO A SPECIALIST. THAT WAS A WEEK AGO. **NO ONE** KNEW. NOT HIS EMPLOYER, HIS FRIENDS OR HIS OWN **FAMILY**.

ON HIS DRIVE HOME TONIGHT, TERRY FITZGERALD EXPERIENCED HIS SECOND **BLACKOUT**. HE WAS AT HIS DESK FOR THE **FIRST** ONE.

THIS TIME HE WASN'T AS LUCKY.

IT WAS TRAVELLING AT 40 MILES PER HOUR WHEN THE ONCOMING TRUCK TRIED TO BRAKE. THERE WASN'T TIME.

THE DELIVERY TRUCK COLLIDED WITH TERRY.

HEAD ON.

SMOKE FROM THE WRECKAGE ROSE HIGH INTO THE EVENING SKY BY THE TIME AN AMBULANCE ARRIVED...

...SIGNALLING TO THE SURROUNDING BLOCKS THAT ANOTHER TRAGEDY OF MAN'S MAKING HAD OCCURRED.

SLAM!

NURSE!!

A PEDESTRIAN FOUND HIS WALLET A COUPLE OF YARDS FROM THE CAR.

IT GAVE POLICE A NAME THEY COULD TRACK. WITHIN MINUTES THEY HAD A LIST OF NUMBERS TO CALL.

I'VE GOT A NECK FRACTURE WITH MULTIPLE CONTUSIONS ON THE CHEST AND LEGS. HEARTBEAT IS STABLE AT 72, BLOOD PRESSURE 120 OVER 80.

WANDA...

HIS LOVED ONES WOULD NEED TO KNOW.

SCREECH!

ESPECIALLY HIS WIFE.

SHE KNEW SOMETHING WAS TERRIBLY WRONG THE MOMENT SHE RECEIVED THE CALL.

"GET TO THE HOSPITAL." THAT'S ALL SHE NEEDED TO HEAR.

AFTER LEAVING CYAN, HER DAUGHTER, WITH THE NEIGHBORS, SHE RACED FRANTICALLY TO St. LUKE'S MEDICAL CENTER.

THOUGH SHE DROVE COURTEOUSLY, A DOZEN LAWS WERE BROKEN.

SHE DIDN'T CARE.

MISS? MISS?! MAY I HELP YOU?

YES.

THEY BROUGHT MY HUSBAND IN. TERRY FITZGERALD. ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. HE'D BEEN IN A CAR ACCIDENT.

IS HE DOWN THIS HALL?

LET ME CHECK FOR YOU.

A QUICK CALL LATER...

SECOND FLOOR. HE'S STILL IN X-RAY-- WON'T BE OUT FOR ANOTHER HALF HOUR. YOU CAN...

SHE DOESN'T NEED TO HEAR ANY MORE.

... SO, ALL IN ALL, IT APPEARS YOUR HUSBAND WAS VERY FORTUNATE THIS TIME. HIS SPRAINED ANKLE SHOULD BE FINE IN A FEW DAYS, BUT THE NECK BRACE WILL NEED TO STAY ON FOR AWHILE.

YOUR CAR'S SEATBELT AND AIRBAG JUST DID BOTH OF YOU A HUGE FAVOR.

ANYTHING ELSE, DR. CURTIS?

NOT REALLY. BUT SINCE THIS IS HIS SECOND BLACKOUT...

SECOND?

... I'VE PUT A RUSH REQUEST ON THE RESULTS OF THAT C.A.T SCAN DR. ROLLINS DID LAST WEEK.*

WHAT TEST?! WHEN DID YOU...

OH-oh.

*ISSUE 19.--Tom

HEE HEE... um, YOU SEE, WANDA, I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO GET WORRIED ABOUT A LITTLE TESTING.

I'M A DEAD DUCK.

YOU KNOW ME. ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR BEST INTERESTS. I KNOW HOW KOOKY YOU CAN GET.

KQQKH!?

Um. *EXCUSE ME*, FOLKS. I DIDN'T MEAN TO START ANYTHING.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW IS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY THE BLACKOUTS ARE HAPPENING.

I'LL TAKE A LOOK AT THE X-RAYS AS SOON AS THEY COME IN FROM Dr. ROLLINS' OFFICE. MEANWHILE, I NEED TO KEEP YOU OVERNIGHT, FOR OBSERVATION.

IT'S STANDARD PROCEDURE FOR ACCIDENT VICTIMS. WANT TO MAKE SURE THERE ISN'T ANY INTERNAL HEMORRAGING.

SO I'LL SEE YOU BOTH TOMORROW BEFORE CHECK-OUT.

LISTEN, HONEY, I'M SORRY I OVER-REACTED, BUT THE WHOLE DRIVE OVER HERE I COULDN'T STOP WORRYING WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU. I WAS SO SCARED.

REALLY *SCARED*.

I KNOW.

I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU SOONER ABOUT MY FAINTING SPELL.

IT'S JUST THAT I WAS SCARED, *TOO*-- STILL AM-- OF WHAT THE TESTS MIGHT SAY. FORGIVE ME?

SHE ALWAYS HAS.

SOMEWHERE IN THE SHADOWS...

YOUR RECENT SEPARATION FROM THE SYMBIOTE HAS *ACCELERATED* ITS EVOLUTION, WITHOUT ANY GUIDANCE FROM *YOU*. THIS IS A *VERY* SERIOUS PROBLEM.

YOU SEE, RIGHT NOW THE COSTUME IS RUNNING IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE. IT'S *LOST*. AND, LIKE ANYTHING *ELSE* THAT BECOMES LOST IT WANTS TO RETURN *HOME*.

TO HELL.

PRECISELY. AND SINCE YOU'RE ATTACHED TO IT, YOU'RE GOING ALONG FOR THE RIDE.

SO WHAT CAN I DO?

IT'S RECON-FIGURING ITSELF AT A TREMENDOUS RATE. USUALLY, THE METAMORPHOSIS TAKES *YEARS* TO COMPLETE.

AND *THAT'S* ONLY IF THE COSTUME AND ITS HOST ARE IN *SYNC*... WHICH YOU TWO DEFINATELY *AREN'T*.

DON'T TRIGGER IT. IT *FEEDS* OFF YOU-- YOUR *EVIL*. WHEN IT CAN'T DRAIN FROM YOU, THE *WORMS* BECOME THE CATALYST.

SO NOW I'M MADE OF EVIL.

NOT EXACTLY, AL.

BUT YOUR *ANGER*, EVIL AND SIN COME IN MANY FORMS, YET *ANGER* IS THE ULTIMATE PIPELINE. NOTHING GOOD HAS EVER COME FROM RAGE. YOU'VE BEEN MAD SINCE YOUR REBIRTH -- ALMOST *CONSTANTLY*. *THAT'S* WHAT'S *FEEDING* IT.

YOU HAVE TO LET IT GO. WHAT-*EVER* IS FESTERING INSIDE YOU, *LET IT GO! PLEASE*, FOR *ALL* OF US -- FIND SOME INNER PEACE. JUST *LET THE ANGER* ***DIE.***

A REFLECTION OF YOU. WE'RE THE *SAME*, AL. WE *BOTH* USED TO BE REAL, A *LIFETIME* AGO.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE, COG, I HAVE TO KNOW SOMETHING. WHO **ARE** YOU?

IN SHORT... I'M A SPAWN.

CYAN, No!

C'MON NOW, MOMMY DOESN'T WANT YOU THROWING YOUR FOOD ALL OVER THE PLACE, OKAY?

I'm Spoiled

Oh-oh. Mess. Mommy, mess.

YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S A *BIG* MESS.

LET'S GET DOWN NOW AND GET DRESSED.

WE HAVE TO GO PICK UP *DADDY!* HE GETS TO COME HOME TODAY AND PLAY WITH YOU. WON'T THAT BE FUN? YOU AND DADDY?

MMMPHF

phttt

HOLD STILL! I NEED TO CLEAN YOUR FACE!

AS THEY LEAVE THE HOUSE, WANDA IS ABSOLUTELY BEAMING.

BOUND-LESS JOY INFORMS HER VERY BEING. BIRDS. THE SKY. EVERY-THING SEEMS SO WONDER-FUL.

SHE THANKS GOD FOR ANSWERING HER PRAYERS.

DAD! DAD! DAD!

I THINK SHE'S MORE EXCITED ABOUT YOUR NEW ROOM HERE THAN ANY-THING ELSE.

PUSHH, PLEEZE.

OKAY! JUST TAKE IT EASY ON ME, SWEET-HEART.

HELLO, FOLKS.

HEY, DOC, YOU GOING TO SIGN ME OUT SO I CAN GO HOME NOW?

I'M AFRAID NOT, TERRY.

WE HAVE A PROBLEM. A VERY SERIOUS ONE. YOUR TEST RESULTS CAME IN FROM Dr. ROLLINS' OFFICE. THE SCANS INDICATE A RATHER LARGE GROWTH ON YOUR BRAIN.

IT'S A CANCEROUS TUMOR.

IT *CAN'T* BE!!

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT, DOC?

I WISH I WAS.

YOUR X-RAYS SHOW THE TUMOR NEAR THE BASE OF THE SKULL. IT'S ALREADY THE SIZE OF AN *ORANGE*, BUT THAT WILL SOON CHANGE.

WHAT'RE YOU SAYING? CAN'T YOU JUST *OPERATE* ON IT--TAKE IT *OUT*...?

THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DETERMINE. UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S SHOWN UP IN AN AREA THAT USUALLY INDICATES AN ATTACHMENT. IF THE TUMOR IS *MALIGNANT*, DAMAGE TO THE BRAIN WOULD OCCUR IF WE WERE TO OPERATE.

SO, WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

LET US RUN SOME TESTS ON YOU--DO A BIOPSY TO DETERMINE ITS RATE OF GROWTH... AND WHETHER IT'S MALIGNANT.

DADDY! GO HOME!

"IF IT *IS*...?"

"WE'LL DEAL WITH THAT LATER."

TWENTY HOURS AND A BATTERY OF TESTS LATER...

YOU SEE THIS CLOUDY AREA-- IT REPRESENTS THE CANCER.

WHEN YOU HAD YOUR COLD, A *VIRUS* ENTERED YOUR SYSTEM. USUALLY, THE BODY COMBATS A VIRUS WITH A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT DEFENSES.

BUT AS YOUR COLD GOT WORSE, IT DEVELOPED INTO AN EARLY STAGE OF *PNEUMONIA*. AS THE VIRUS GREW STRONGER, IT TRIGGERED THE LATENT CELLS OF THE *CANCER* TO GROW.

MEANING YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD THIS IN YOU, JUST IN A DORMANT STATE. YOU, LIKE MILLIONS OF OTHERS, WERE PROBABLY BORN WITH IT.

UNFORTUNATELY, ITS POSITIONING MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO OPERATE. TO REMOVE IT *ALL*, I'D HAVE TO REMOVE PART OF THE BRAIN, ***TOO***. THIS IS COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT THE TUMOR IS ***MALIGNANT***.

MALIGNANT.

TERRY SQUEEZES WANDA EVEN HARDER.

SO IT'D JUST GROW BACK, EVEN IF YOU ***COULD*** REMOVE IT.

YES.

MEANING I'M GOING TO *DIE*. ISN'T THAT RIGHT, DOCTOR? H-HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?

AT ITS CURRENT RATE OF GROWTH, ABOUT TWO MONTHS, BUT THERE IS A SERIES OF PROCEDURES THAT CAN SLOW THE SPREAD OF IT.

WHILE ARRANGING FOR CYAN TO STAY WITH CLOSE FRIENDS WANDA TELLS THEM ONLY THAT SHE NEEDS SOME TIME ALONE TO SORT THINGS OUT.

HER FRIENDS PRY NO FURTHER AS SHE MUSTERS A WEAK SMILE, SAYING SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT, BEFORE LEAVING.

HER GUARD GOES DOWN THE MOMENT SHE ARRIVES HOME.

SO DOES SHE.

DAYS LATER...

GRANNIE?

AL? YOU BACK SO SOON?* I THOUGHT YOU WOULD. NOW COME INTO THE LIGHT SO I CAN *SEE* YOU BETTER.

SEE?! BUT I THOUGHT YOU WERE--

BLIND? I AM. IT WAS JUST A JOKE, AL. YOU'VE BECOME SO *SERIOUS* SINCE YOU MOVED TO HEAVEN. REMEMBER HOW YOU USED TO MAKE ME LAUGH?

I DO.

I MISS THAT PART OF YOU. WHY HAS THAT DIS-APPEARED?

I DON'T KNOW. BUT THAT'S PART OF WHY I'M HERE.

*LAST ISSUE --Tom.

A FRIEND TOLD ME TO FIND INNER PEACE. SOMETHING CALMING. YOU ALWAYS GAVE ME THOSE FEELINGS WHEN I WAS ALIVE.

IF I CAN HELP BRING YOUR LAUGHTER, IT'D MAKE MY DAY. IT'S TOO EASY TO FORGET WHAT'S *REALLY* IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

SO I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A *FAVOR*. COULD YOU GO SEE TERRY?--GIVE HIM SOME HOPE FOR TO-MORROW?

I SEE NOW I TOOK THAT FOR GRANTED.

TERRY?

WE *ALL* DO THAT, CHILD. IT'S PART OF BEING HUMAN.

YEAH. THINGS HAVE REALLY BEEN TOUGH ON HIM AND WANDA SINCE HE GOT SICK. THE DOCTORS SAY...

...oh, *LISTEN* TO ME.

YOU'RE AN *ANGEL*. YOU PROBABLY ALREADY *KNOW* WHY HE'S DYING.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

LATER THAT WEEK...

THE DOCTORS SAY YOUR MEDICATION IS HELPING CONTROL THE SWELLING A BIT. ISN'T THAT GREAT?

SURE.

BUT THE SIDE EFFECTS ARE SCREWING UP THE *REST* OF YOUR BODY. YOU HAVE TO *FIGHT* IT, BABY. DON'T GIVE IN. NOT NOW. I NEED YOU TOO MUCH. SO DOES CYAN.

TELL CYAN I MISS HER. I LOVE HER--AND *YOU*. MAYBE IF I'D BEEN A BETTER HUSBAND NONE OF THIS WOULD--

HUSH!

YOU DIDN'T HAVE CONTROL OVER THIS. IT ISN'T YOUR FAULT.

WANDA STAYS AT HIS BEDSIDE AS MUCH AS SHE CAN, TRYING TO KEEP HIS SPIRITS UP WITH EACH VISIT. MANY TIMES THE NURSES JUST LET HER STAY THROUGH THE NIGHT.

EXHAUSTED THIS NIGHT AS WELL, SHE SLEEPS, UNAWARE OF THE SENTINEL BESIDE HER.

TERRY USED TO BE HIS BEST FRIEND.

BUT NO MORE.

SINCE COMING BACK FROM THE DEAD AS A HELLSPAWN, AL HAS DISCOVERED HIS FRIEND'S TRUE SIDE.

THAT OF A TRAITOR.

TERRY STOLE HIS **WIFE** FROM HIM. GAVE HER THE **CHILD** HE NEVER COULD. **PROTECTED** THE MAN WHO ORDERED HIS **DEATH.**

WHY SHOULD HE HELP HIM-- ESPECIALLY **NOW**, WHEN HIS SYMBIOTE IS BEHAVING SO ERRATICALLY.

COG TOLD HIM TO RELAX. NOT USE HIS POWERS.

AND HE WON'T. NOT FOR HIM. HE'S NOT WORTH GOING TO HELL FOR.

SO WHY DID HE COME?

TO GLOAT?

AND WHY DID HE SAVE TERRY AWHILE BACK?*

MAYBE HE DID WANT TO **HELP**... BUT NOT TO THE EXTENT OF MAKING THAT KIND OF **SACRIFICE**. NOT FOR **TERRY.**

CONFUSED, HE LEAVES.

*ISSUE 24 -- Tom

SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT. SHE COULD TELL. THE NURSES HAD GENERALLY BEEN QUITE FRIENDLY.

WHY WERE THEY LOOKING AWAY FROM HER-- AVOIDING EYE CONTACT?

ELAINE...? IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

IT CAME SO *FAST*, WANDA. WE COULDN'T *STOP* IT. BY THE TIME Dr. CURTIS GOT TO HIM...

NO.

NO!

TERRY!

207

DEAR GOD.

THE WEB OF MACHINERY HOOKED TO HER HUSBAND PAINTS AN UGLY PICTURE.

IT'S A LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM... BEATING RHYTHMICALLY... HELPING TERRY BREATHE.

WH-WHAT'S HAPPENING TO HIM?

WE TRIED TO CALL, BUT...

I SAID WHAT'S WRONG?!

A *COMA*. HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS A FEW HOURS AGO. WE'VE RUN A FEW PRELIMINARY SCANS. IT DOESN'T LOOK GOOD.

THERE'S BEEN EXTENSIVE BRAIN DAMAGE. HE CAN'T EVEN *BREATHE* ON HIS OWN.

PARTS OF HIS BRAIN HAVE SHUT DOWN, HAVE STOPPED SENDING CERTAIN MESSAGES. THERE WAS A LACK OF OXYGEN UP THERE FOR OVER TWO MINUTES, WHICH CAUSED MOST OF THE DAMAGE.

I'M TRULY SORRY, MS. BLAKE, BUT AT THIS POINT THERE'S VERY LITTLE WE CAN DO.

ARTIFICIALLY, WE CAN KEEP HIM ALIVE INDEFINITELY-- *IF* HE DOESN'T *WORSEN*.

MEANING HE'LL NEVER COME *OUT* OF THIS?!

NOT NECESSARILY...

"... BUT THE CHANCE FOR ANY *NORMALITY* IS GONE. IF HE *DOES* WAKE FROM THIS, HE WON'T BE THE SAME. EXPECT LIMITED MOTOR FUNCTIONS, IF NOT *PARALYSIS*. HE WON'T KNOW HIS OWN NAME.

"THAT'S NOT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE *CANCER*, WHICH WE CAN'T STOP. I'M *SORRY*, MS. BLAKE. I WISH I COULD BE MORE HOPEFUL."

"IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, DOCTOR. CAN I... CAN I BE *ALONE* WITH HIM, PLEASE."

AS THE DAYS PASS, MORE DETAILS BECOME CLEAR.

THE SAD PROGNOSIS DOES NOT CHANGE.

TERRY WON'T SEE HIS DAUGHTER GROW INTO A WOMAN.

CYAN WON'T EVER BOUNCE ON HER DADDY'S KNEE AGAIN.

*AND WORSE-- CYAN MIGHT NOT EVEN **REMEMBER** HER FATHER WHEN SHE'S OLDER.*

"OF COURSE."

AS FOR WANDA, SHE'LL NOT HAVE THE CHANCE TO GROW OLD WITH A MAN SHE SO DESPERATELY LOVES.

AT THE TENDER AGE OF TWENTY-NINE, WANDA SHOULD BE FULL OF LIFE, LOOKING FORWARD TO EACH NEW DAY AND ITS ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.

NOT ANYMORE. FOR THE **SECOND** TIME, SHE WILL OUTLIVE HER HUSBAND -- ONE, KILLED IN THE **LINE OF DUTY** FIVE YEARS AGO. AND NOW **ANOTHER**, BEING **EATEN ALIVE BY CANCER.**

SO SHE RETREATS INWARD, SHUTTING HERSELF OFF FROM EVERYTHING. EVERYONE. IT'S THE ONLY WAY SHE HAS TO HANDLE HER **PAIN:**

...TO BECOME COMPLETELY NUMB TO IT ALL.

JUST LIKE **HIM.** HE'S LOST THE PRECIOUS THINGS, TOO.

HE TORTURES HIMSELF CONSTANTLY WITH HIS UNREALISTIC HOPES THAT HE CAN GET HER BACK AGAIN.

IT'S ALL THAT'S LEFT. FALSE HOPE.

AND A LOVE THAT'S NEVER WANED.

FOREVER.

THAT LOVE IS TO BECOME A CURSE.

BECAUSE HE'D PROMISED HER, ON THEIR HONEYMOON, TO ALWAYS KEEP HER HAPPY.

FOREVER.

HE STILL REMEMBERS THE TEARS IN HER EYES, AND THE LOVE SHE GAVE HIM.

THE ONE WORD CONTINUES TO HAUNT HIM. FOREVER.

FOREVER.

I PROMISED YOU, WANDA.

EVEN IF IT COSTS HIM ALL HIS REMAINING HOPE.

AS THE FIRST JOLT IS UNLEASHED, HE TELLS HIMSELF THIS ISN'T ABOUT TERRY. IT'S ABOUT WANDA.

TERRY'S BODY ARCHES AGAINST THE PAIN. A SPASTIC FINGER CATCHES THE LACING THAT HOLDS SPAWN'S FACE TOGETHER.

SPAWN BARELY NOTICES.

HE'S THINKING ABOUT HIS LIFE.

HIS WIFE.

THEY'LL NEVER BE TOGETHER AGAIN, SO ALL THAT MATTERS IS HER HAPPINESS-- AND HIS PROMISE.

IT'S TIME HE LET HER GO.

AL?

I USED TO BE.

HE HESITATES, THEN HEARS THE WORD AGAIN:

FOREVER!

THEN HE'S GONE... VANISHED TO GOD ONLY KNOWS WHERE.

uh...?

HELP!!

HELP ME!!

BZZT BZZT BZZT

THOSE SCREAMS...?!

OH, NO! I'VE GOT A *FLAT LINE* IN ROOM 207!

CODE BLUE!

ELAINE, GRAB A CRASH CART AND COME WITH ME-- *STAT!*

THEY'VE BEEN TRAINED FOR EVERY SITUATION POSSIBLE, THESE NURSES.

OR SO THEY THINK.

HELP!!

PLEASE, CAN SOMEBODY HELP MY WIFE...?

I THINK SHE'S FAINTED.

THE STAFF WILL SEARCH FOR ANSWERS TO THIS MIRACULOUS EVENT.

THEY WON'T FIND ANY CLUES.

DESTINY.

SOME BELIEVE THAT, FROM THEIR FIRST MOMENT OF EXISTENCE, LIFE AS THEY KNOW IT HAS BEEN **PREORDAINED**. THAT ETERNITY IS CONTROLLED BY FORCES TOO GREAT FOR HUMANS TO EVER UNDERSTAND.

THEY ARE WRONG.

WE THINK AS WE DO, ACT AS WE DO AS A RESULT OF WHAT LIES **WITHIN**. A **SEED** HAS BEEN PLANTED IN EACH OF US. HOW IT WILL GROW DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL.

THE SEED IS CALLED A **SOUL**.

THOUGH THE BODY EVENTUALLY DIES, THE SOUL MOVES ON. ITS ESSENCE IS THE TRUE VALUE OF EACH OF US, AN ESSENCE MEASURED BY THE SOUL'S ORIGINAL POTENTIAL AND ITS RESULTING CONDITION AFTER A LIFETIME OF INDIVIDUAL CHOICE.

THAT VALUE IS WHAT THE LORDS OF THE AFTERLIFE ARE MOST INTERESTED IN.

AT DEATH, EACH BEING MAKES THE SAME VOYAGE, WITH FRAGMENTED MEMORIES SPINNING IN THE VOID. THOSE SCATTERED IMPRESSIONS SHINE LIKE BEACONS, SENDING AN UNDOCTORED RESUME OF THAT INDIVIDUAL.

IT'S FROM THIS INFORMATION THAT WE ARE DEALT OUR FINAL JUDGMENT. OUR DESTINY.

THERE ARE ONLY TWO POSSIBLE OUTCOMES. HEAVEN OR HELL.

BY THIS POINT, WE ARE LOOKED UPON, NOT AS WHAT WE WERE AT DEATH, BUT AS WHAT WE MAY YET BECOME.

IN TERMS OF BOTH GOOD AND EVIL.

WITH HEAVEN AND HELL ALTERNATING CHOICES FROM AN ENDLESS POOL OF HUMANITY.

THE PICKS ARE BASED ON PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS. GETTING TO HEAVEN DOES **NOT** INDICATE A SPIRIT'S 'GOODNESS' ANY MORE THAN A SENTENCE TO HELL MEANS THERE IS AN 'EVILNESS'.

SOMETIMES THE DECISION IS MADE STRICTLY TO PREVENT THE **OTHER** SIDE FROM ACQUIRING ANOTHER VALUABLE PROPERTY.

IT'S UP TO GOD--OR SATAN--TO EXPLOIT EACH INDIVIDUAL'S STRENGTHS...

...OR WEAKNESSES.

FOR HELL, THE TWO EASIEST ARE ALWAYS **REVENGE** OR **LOVE.**

IT'S THE LATTER THAT DAMNED AL SIMMONS.

DEEP IN MANHATTAN'S BOWERY, IT STIRS...

...DREAMING OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN AND WHAT MIGHT YET **BE**...

...IF THE BALANCE OF THINGS WERE TO SLIP EVER SO SLIGHTLY.

PLOP

ZZZZZ

IT TAKES A FEW SECONDS FOR THE FACTS TO GARNER A RESPONSE.

Uh...?

WHAT?!

HOLY HERPE! HE'S GONE!

MEOWW!

AND HE DID IT TO *HIMSELF*... THE *DOOFUS!*

FOR MONTHS NOW, THE **CLOWN** HAS BEEN TRYING TO PROVE TO HIS HELLISH FORMER MASTER THAT THE **NEW** SPAWN, LIKE ALL THE **OTHERS**, IS UNWORTHY OF SUCH VAST POWER.

THE PROPER LEADERS OF HELL'S ARMY, HE CONTENDS, ARE THOSE **BORN** AND **BRED** IN THE BLACK ABYSS.

NOW, HIS POINT HAS BEEN *VALIDATED.*

FOR CENTURIES THIS CREATURE, ONCE HONORED WITH THE TASK OF CHAPERONING EACH OF MALEBOLGIA'S NEW HELLSPAWN, HAS DREAMT OF THIS MOMENT.

FROLICKING WITH SOILED DISCARDS AND ROTTED GARBAGE, HIS CELEBRATION REACHES FEVER PITCH.

THEN COMES A THOUGHT--

--AND WITH IT, THE LOSS OF ANY JOY.

WAIT A MINUTE!

SIMMONS IS BACK IN HELL, BUT I DIDN'T PUT HIM THERE! HE SCREWED HIMSELF UP, LIKE A LOT OF THE OTHERS DID.

SO MALEBOLGIA WILL JUST FIND ANOTHER IN A CENTURY OR TWO.

CRAP.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I WANTED. HE NEEDS TO SEE THAT NO HUMAN SHOULD BE CHOSEN EVER AGAIN.

IT'S HIS OWN CHILDREN WHO SHOULD LEAD. WE ARE THE TRUE EVIL.

I NEED TO PROVE THAT TO HIM, ONCE AND FOR ALL...

...AND I KNOW JUST WHERE TO START.

A FEW DAYS LATER...

OUTPATIENT REGISTRATION

AFTERNOON, MS. BLAKE.

HELLO, DOCTOR. YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO SEE ME.

YES. I JUST RECEIVED THE RESULTS OF THE LATEST TESTS. AND TO BE QUITE HONEST, THIS WHOLE SITUATION HAS EVERYONE COMPLETELY STUMPED.

THERE'S NO MORE EVIDENCE OF CANCER *ANYWHERE* IN HIS BODY. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE AREA OF HIS HEAD WHICH WAS AFFECTED IS CLEANER THAN NORMAL. WE'VE RUN EVERY DIAGNOSTIC I CAN THINK OF. EACH RESULT IS *NEGATIVE*.

SO WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

HOLY BIBLE

CALL IT A MIRACLE, BUT TERRY IS 100% CURED. SO, UNLESS EITHER ONE OF YOU HAS ANY OBJECTIONS...

... I'M RELEASING HIM TOMORROW. IT'S TIME HE WENT HOME TO HIS FAMILY.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR. AND IF YOU DON'T MIND, I'D LIKE TO TELL HIM MYSELF.

OF COURSE.

THE DRIVE HOME FOUND THEM WITH LITTLE TO SAY. AND, AS TERRY WIPED A FEW TEARS FROM HIS WIFE'S CHEEK, THE TWO OF THEM FELL SILENT. LOVING GLANCES SPOKE FOR THEM... OF AWE, AND RELIEF, AND THE CERTAINTY THAT BEING WITH EACH OTHER MEANS MORE THAN ANYTHING.

CYAN'S GOING TO BE SO HAPPY TO SEE HER DADDY BACK HOME.

JUST KNOWING I'LL GET TO SEE HER PRETTY FACE AS SHE GROWS UP-- AND YOURS AS WE GROW OLDER-- MAKES ANYTHING I'LL HAVE TO BEAR FROM NOW ON SEEM EASY.

I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW GOOD SHE BEHAVED AT THE HOSPITAL EACH TIME. SHE SURE...

CLICK

SURPRISE!!

FRIENDS.

A THRONG OF PEOPLE WHO NEVER BELIEVED A WORD OF THE MURDER ACCUSATIONS GATHER NOW TO WELCOME HIM HOME.

TERRY LOOKS AT EACH OF THEM AND SMILES. HE'LL NEVER AGAIN TAKE TRUE FRIENDSHIP FOR GRANTED.

TERRY GOES ON GRINNING BROADLY FOR THE REST OF THE EVENING.

HE MAKES SURE CYAN DOESN'T FEEL FORGOTTEN BY RIDING HER ON HIS SHOULDERS MOST OF THE TIME.

AND EVEN WHILE INVOLVED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EVERYONE IN REACH, HE CAN'T SEEM TO STOP GAZING AT JUST ONE SIGHT -- HIS WIFE.

HOURS LATER, HE FALLS INTO A DEEP SLEEP. BEING IN HIS OWN BED BRINGS A CERTAIN COMFORT: THE SECURITY TO RELAX.

AND DREAM ABOUT PEOPLE AND THINGS.

THINGS HAUNTING.

THINGS FAMILIAR.

AL.

THE DREAM REPEATS ITSELF, OVER AND OVER.

YOU KNOW, THE REAL WEIRD THING ABOUT ALL THIS IS THAT I FELT SOME SORT OF PRESENCE OVER ME, BACK AT THE HOSPITAL.

YOU MEAN GOD?

NO... AT LEAST I DON'T THINK SO. IT WAS MORE LIKE... LIKE...

OK, FORGET IT. I'M JUST RAMBLING.

NO YOU'RE NOT. I KNOW WHO IT WAS 'CAUSE I SENT HIM MYSELF. IT WAS *AL*.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

SURE. WHEN I HEARD YOU'D BEEN HURT, I ASKED HIM TO HELP IF HE COULD.

THEY CALL WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU A ***MIRACLE***. THEY'RE ***RIGHT***. AL SOMEHOW GAVE YOU YOUR ***LIFE*** BACK. YOU ***REMEMBER*** THAT.

BUT IT'S KINDA FUNNY, YOU KNOW.

WHAT IS?

WELL, AL. HE SEEMED SO *TORTURED* ABOUT HIS NEW EXISTENCE. SAID HE WASN'T *WORTHY* OF HIS POWERS. I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING ONE OF GOD'S CHOSEN ANGELS. BUT HE PROVED HIMSELF BY HELPING YOU.

WITH ALL CONCEPT OF TIME OBLITERATED, SPAWN'S ETHEREAL PRESENCE BREAKS THE BLACK VEIL.

A YEAR? A DAY? A SECOND?

NO ONE KNOWS HOW MUCH TIME THE SOUL'S TRANSITION TAKES, BUT DEATH MAKES IT **INEVITABLE.**

AT THAT POINT, THERE IS ONE RULE ADHERED TO BY BOTH SIDES:

"THOSE SOULS WHO SHALL RETURN TO THE AFTERLIFE PAST THE INITIAL ENTRY WILL FOREVER BE REMANDED TO THEIR FIRST LORD."

IN SHORT, SPAWN HAS RETURNED TO HELL.

TO COMPLETE THE ODYSSEY, HIS SPIRIT NESTLES ONCE MORE INTO THE FORM IT INHABITED MOST RECENTLY.

THOUGH HE DOESN'T RECALL THE EVENTS FOLLOWING HIS FIRST DEATH, WHAT HE SEES APPEARS UNFAMILIAR.

IT IS.

STRETCHED NOW BEFORE HIM IS A VAST WASTELAND: HELL'S SECOND LEVEL.

AS A FORMER VISITOR TO ANOTHER, HIGHER LEVEL, HIS PRESENCE IS ACKNOWLEDGED IMMEDIATELY:

AN ENEMY HAS TRESPASSED IN THEIR SACRED LANDS.

THEY APPEAR OUT OF NOWHERE... **GNATS**... THAT GAPING WOUND IN HIS FACE, NO LONGER TIED SHUT, ALLOWS THEM TO DIG **DEEPLY**.

WHILE HE'S DISTRACTED, THE **GROUND ITSELF** JOINS THE FRAY, SWALLOWING ONE LEG AND HOLDING IT IN A **DEATH GRIP**.

IT'S ONLY THE START.

NEK-TONK

ANOTHER WAVE CONVERGES, **SCREAMING** PAST THE CLOAKED HERO. SUDDENLY, THEY SNATCH A FEW OF HIS CAPE'S TENDRILS.

THEIR ATTACK IS FAR FROM RANDOM, HE REALIZES.

THEN, BURROWING UNDERGROUND, THE LEATHERY CREATURES DISAPPEAR.

THE HELLSPAWN IS NOW PULLED TAUT AS A STAKED TENT.

INTRUDERS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED-- EVEN THOSE FROM OTHER LEVELS.

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

THE UNHOLY LAWS REQUIRE THE STRAINS REMAIN PURE.

HYBRIDS WILL ONLY DESTROY THEIR UTOPIA.

YET, WITHOUT THE HYBRIDS, THEY CANNOT LIVE.

AND SO, INTRUDERS THAT HAVE TRIED TO CROSS THE VOID INTO THE NEXT LEVEL ARE PUT TO A PURPOSE BEFORE THEY DIE THE DEATH OF HELL.

NEK-TORR

NEK-TORR

INSANITY SPIRALLING AROUND HIM, SPAWN TRIES TO KEEP A GRIP, EVEN AS THE WEIGHT OF THE DEMON HORDE PREPARES TO SUFFOCATE HIM.

NEK-TORR

THROUGH THE CRACKS, THE SMALL ONES GET THERE FIRST.

AS HIS VISION BEGINS TO BLUR, AL SIMMONS WONDERS WHAT HE DID TO DESERVE THIS FATE-- THIS CURSE OF THE SPAWN.

WAS IT THE KILLINGS?

HE WAS ONLY FOLLOWING ORDERS, HE THINKS.

TOTAL DAMNATION FOR ANY MURDERER, THAT'S WHAT IT MUST BE.

NEK-TORR

THEY ARE NOWHERE. THEY ARE EVERYWHERE.

FIGHTING EACH OTHER FOR POSITION.

SO HE GIVES IN AND GOES LIMP, JUST AS THE PARCHED LAND GOES BLACK.

NEK-TORR?!

BUT HELL, LIKE HEAVEN, WAS NEVER MEANT FOR MAN TO UNDERSTAND.

IT'S A PLACE OF PAIN. HORROR. ANGUISH. FAR BEYOND ANYTHING POSSIBLE ON EARTH.

NEK-TORR MEEEE!

YET, AS ON EARTH, A PECKING ORDER HAS EVOLVED--ONE PREDICATED ON SIZE. NOT SURPRISINGLY, RESENTMENT EXISTS.

THEY FOUND HIM FIRST, THE SMALL ONES DID.

THEY'LL NOT LEAVE HIM BEHIND.

NEK-TORR!

A PILLAR OF THEIR REMAINS PETRIFIES IN A HEART-BEAT...

...LEAVING JUST AN EXPOSED TIP.

NOW FULLY EXPOSED FOR THE TAKING, SPAWN'S HEAD WAS THE ULTIMATE PRIZE... THOUGH NOT **HIM** AS MUCH AS WHAT **MADE** HIM:

NECROPLASM. CONCOCTED AN INFINITY AGO IN HELL'S DARKEST REACHES, IT SERVES MANY USES ON MANY LEVELS.

IN MALEBOLGIA'S REALM, IT'S WHAT HIS WARRIORS ARE MADE OF.

BUT **HERE**, THE PLASM HAS ANOTHER PURPOSE: **FOOD**. WITHOUT TRESPASSERS TO FEAST ON, THE INHABITANTS WOULD HAVE PERISHED LONG AGO.

SO, EACH VICTIM BECAME THEIR VITAL NOURISHMENT.

THEIR CALORIES. THEIR JUICES.

THEIR SWEET NECTAR.

SPAWN WILL HAVE **NONE** OF IT. IF HE IS TO DIE HERE, THEN HE MEANS TO TAKE AS MANY OF THEM WITH HIM AS POSSIBLE.

GREEN ENERGY CRACKLES. SINCE HE'S A PRISONER OF HELL, WHAT DOES SPAWN CARE ABOUT CONSERVING HIS POWERS ANY LONGER?

HE THOUGHT HE'D JUST GIVE UP AND DIE. HE CHANGED HIS MIND.

LT. COLONEL AL SIMMONS HAS ONE MORE FIGHT LEFT IN HIM.

FOR A HUNDRED MILES THE SKIES TURN GREEN.

IT'S HIS WAY OF EXORCIZING HIS OWN PERSONAL DEMONS.

HIS WIFE IS LOST TO HIM. FOREVER.

SHEER ANGER IS ALL THAT COMES FROM THAT THOUGHT.

PREPARE, DEMON, TO EAT YOUR HEART!

ADRENALINE IS TRIGGERED.

RELEASING ONCE AGAIN THE TRUE SPIRIT OF THE WARRIOR.

BRACED AGAINST PETRIFIED DEBRIS, HE STANDS READY FOR ATTACK.

FOOD. THAT'S ALL SPAWN IS TO THE CHARGING MONSTROSITY.

SOMETHING TO FEED ITS CRAVINGS. NO MATTER THE SOURCE.

ITS OWN SLAVES OFTEN FILL THE BILL.

IF YOU'RE SO GODDAMNED HUNGRY...

...CHOKE ON THIS!

LIKE SOME CRAZED TARZAN, SPAWN CLIMBS ATOP HIS KILL. FROTHING AT THE MOUTH, HE LETS RIP A NOISE NO HUMAN COULD POSSIBLY CONCEIVE OF.

THE SOUND, AUDIBLE OUT TO THE DESERT, IS CUT SHORT WHEN THE HELLSPAWN ABRUPTLY EVAPORATES.

ELSEWHERE IN TIME...

Perfect! It went just as I'd planned. My little Spawn has just picked up the first of his new gifts.

Unknowingly, of course.

C'MON, HONEY! TIME TO GO HOME. THANK MEGAN FOR INVITING YOU TO HER PARTY.

BALLOON! BALLOON!

OKAY, GO GRAB ONE.

THERE YOU ARE, DEAR, SWEET CYAN.

YOU'RE FUNNY.

THANK YOU.

BYE-BYE. I'LL SEE YOU SOON.

Hee hee hee hee hee

A few more pieces and my 'Grim Reaper' will be ready. Enjoy your next level, Simmons.

Capulla
Sp.
D.: McFarlane

With *Spawn,* legendary writer and artist Todd McFarlane unleashed his iconic antihero on the world, and launched the most successful independent comic book in history.

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